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Natural Obligations

To Believe the

Principles of Religion,

A N D

DIVINE REVELATION:

In XVI Sermons,

Preached in the

Church of St. *Mary le Bow, London,*

In the Years 1717 and 1718.

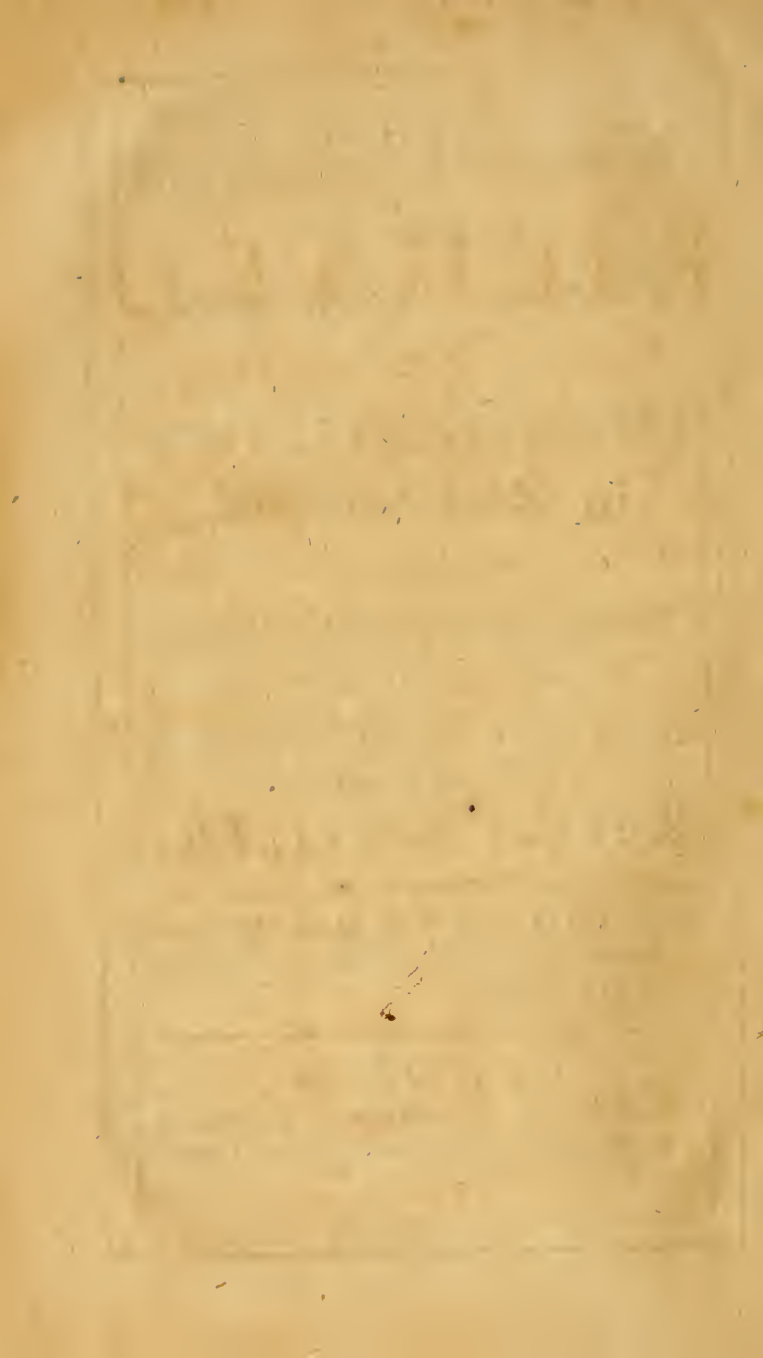
At the *LECTURE* founded by
The Honourable

ROBERT BOYLE, *Esq;*

By *JOHN LENG*, D.D. Rector of
Bedington, and Chaplain in Ordinary
to His Majesty.

L O N D O N:

Printed by *W. B.* for ROBERT KNAPLOCK,
at the *Bishop's Head* in St. Paul's Church-
yard. MDCCXIX,



TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
RICHARD,
Earl of Burlington ;

The Right Reverend Fathers in God,

CHARLES, *Lord Bishop of Norwich,*

EDMUND, *Lord Bishop of Lincoln,*

SAMUEL, *Lord Bishop of Carlile,*

AND

WHITE, *Lord Bishop of Peterborough,*

TRUSTEES,

Appointed by the Most Reverend Father-in
God, THOMAS, late Lord Archbishop of
Canterbury, the last surviving Trustee
Named

BY THE HONOURABLE

Robert Boyle, Esq;

These Sermons are most
humbly dedicated.

RICHARD

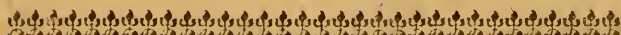
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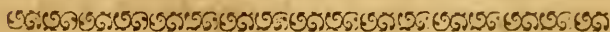
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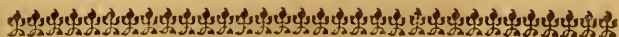


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ERRATA.

- Page 11, at the bottom, for *Pleasure* read *it*.
24, for *Religion*. And r. *Religion, and*.
36, at the bottom, for p. 1. r p. 170.
55, for *away* r. *any*.
69, for *absur'd* r. *absurd*.
ib. at the bottom, for *imbecillate*, r. *imbecillitate*.
91, for *April 4th* r. *April the 1st*.
115, for *their* r. *there*.
176, for *ἐαυτέας* r. *ἐαυτοῖς*.
193, for *judicio* r. *judicia*.
267, for *iv.* r. *ix*.





S E R M O N I.

Preached *January* the 7th 17¹⁶₁₇.



Heb. iii. 12.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.



THESE words of the Apostle are spoken to such as were at that time supposed to be believers of the Christian Doctrine, at least in such a degree as, in some measure, to acknowledge it to be from God, and to be well persuaded of the truth of its first principles; though some of them perhaps not sufficiently instructed, as yet, in all the con-
B sequences

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sequences of those principles, or in all the several branches of Christian faith and practice : And they contain a general exhortation to beware of falling back into a state of infidelity, or of disbelieving and renouncing that Gospel doctrine which they had once entertained, and upon which, as a foundation, he intended to build those farther Doctrines which were necessary to render the Christian Institution compleat.

The expressions here made use of, are such as plainly imply the the several following Particulars.

I. That Infidelity of the Christian Doctrine, when plainly proposed to us, is in a great measure voluntary, and therefore chargeable to mens own account: for else it would be unreasonable to give such a caution to beware of it.

II. That it proceeds from a vitious disposition of mind and affections : it has not its original in the head or understanding, but in the heart, being called *an evil heart of unbelief*.

III. That it is a revolting from that natural duty which we owe to God, the author of our life and being, a *departing from the Living God*; and therefore,

4. That

S E R M O N I. 3

4. That men by falling into such Infidelity may be highly culpable before God, and, as such, may be justly punishable by him for the perverse use of those faculties, and means of employing, them which he has bestowed upon them.

I need not add, that the caution it self supposes, that men who have once been believers may for want of care and attention, and of living according to their belief, relapse into a state of Infidelity, either partial or total; they may be *so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*, as by degrees to set themselves against that Truth which they have formerly admitted. And therefore, if I were now to speak only to those who do at present believe the Gospel, and own their belief of it; and who do, upon that account, take these words of the Apostle to be the direction or caution of God Almighty by his inspired Minister, I might speak very usefully to the forementioned particulars, as a Warning to all Christians to *hold fast the profession of their faith*, and shew how much we are all concerned in this Apostolical advice; lest by neglecting to make a proper use of that Doctrine which God hath revealed to us for the direction of our lives,

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and by suffering our lusts and passions to prevail over our reason and consideration, we should first put away a good Conscience, and by that means be tempted, or wrought upon, to make shipwreck of our Faith.

But since I am now supposed to direct my discourse to such as pretend not yet to be persuaded of the truth or importance of the Christian Religion, and to such as are diffident of the principles of all Religion, or at least are willing to dispute themselves into a disbelief of it, or such great uncertainty about it, as makes them utterly unconcerned whether it be true or false; I must not, to such men, use these words of the Text in an Authorative manner, nor urge them any farther than as a piece of prudent advice, which is not allowed by them to have any more weight in it, than what may be made plain and evident from the Reason and nature of the thing.

And upon this foundation I shall at this time apply my self to such as deny, or dispute against the common principles of Religion, and think it a very innocent and indifferent matter, either to believe them, or not believe them, as it shall happen, as having respect only to their present convenience, and not concerned about any future consequences; and shall

S E R M O N I. 5

shall endeavour to persuade them from common Reason, that it is their duty not to be unconcerned in the case, but to give the arguments that have been, or may be offered in behalf of the principles of Religion, a fair, and serious, and impartial hearing and examination. And in order to this, I desire that they would, without prejudice, consider the following particulars.

I. That there may be other probable causes of Infidelity often assigned besides want of evidence; even when this is pretended as an excuse for it.

II. That the principles of Religion are of that high nature, and universal concernment to mankind, that we cannot answer it to our own reason to be unconcerned about them; and therefore that we must, as rational creatures, endeavour to be satisfied about them.

III. That if we have sufficient reason to believe the great principles of Religion; such as the Being of a God, and a Providence, and a Future state, &c. our unbelief will not excuse us from a crime in the sight of God.

IV. That it is unreasonable for any man to endeavour to persuade others out of the principles of Religion, till he himself is first evi-

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dently convinced that they are false, and disadvantageous to mankind.

V. That it is still more unreasonable to make them the subject of raillery and ridicule.

I. That there may be other probable causes of Infidelity often assigned, besides want of evidence, even when this is pretended as an excuse for it. Though such as do not believe are very ready to charge all believers with unreasonable credulity, and to excuse their own unbelief with this pretence, that they have not sufficient evidence to convince them; yet this may be nothing else but a general desire which all men have to justify their own conduct, and remove the blame from themselves. They declare indeed, that they are ready to think freely upon all subjects, and willing, as they say, to submit to reason; but then the reason ought, in their opinion, to be such as to command their assent, so plain and clear that it cannot be denied. But that the principles of Religion carry no such forcible evidence with them. For if they did, who could deny his assent to them? and if they do not, what harm can there be in refusing it? This is their way of arguing. And indeed if there were no voluntary indisposition in any
man

S E R M O N I. 7

man which could hinder him from discerning a plain reason when proposed to him, there would be some force in the argument. But if there may be corrupt inclinations, passions or prejudices, which blind mens understanding, and keep them from assenting to some truths, which appear plain and evident to those who are free and unprejudiced, then their argument has no force; and we cannot judge of the strength or weakness of that Evidence which is offered for any truth, merely from the effect which it has upon those to whom it is offered.

They that disbelieve the great Truths of Religion must needs own, that those who do believe them, believe upon insufficient arguments, or else they would be self-condemned for not believing; and therefore they must also own, that as much of the belief as has no competent argument to support it, must be founded upon some wrong disposition of the person believing; that is, he has some prejudice, passion or affection, which inclines him to believe that argument good which in it self is not so, even though he himself is not, for the time, aware of any such undue prejudice. Now certainly if Credulity may arise from such a bias, Incredulity may also proceed from ano-

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ther biaſs. For we ſee plainly in other caſes, that the very ſame arguments propoſed in the ſame light to different men, even of the ſame natural abilities, ſhall have very different effects, and that which entirely convinces one, ſhall not in the leaſt move another, though ſuppoſed to be of equal underſtanding. And yet both ſides are unwilling to own any defect or prejudice in themſelves, and chuſe rather to blame the argument itſelf, or the underſtandings of other people who apprehend the argument differently from what themſelves do.

And as it is in other caſes, ſo it is in Religion, the arguments for the truth of it may be very good and concluſive, but ſome men may be indispoſed for the receiving of them. As for inſtance,

I. Some men are ſo far immerſed in the things of this life, in the purſuits of riches or pleaſures, or the like, that they will not be at the pains to conſider whether there be any force in ſuch arguments as relate to the Being of a God and a future ſtate, or no; and ſo content themſelves with being ignorant or indifferent about them. Others, by indulging their luſts and paſſions, contract a ſtupidity towards things of an higher nature, or by too eaſily entertaining ſuch prejudices

S E R M O N I. 9

judices as favour their corrupt inclinations, appetites or humours, grow unwilling to admit of any thing that contradicts them: They would be glad to have things so as best suits their own present vicious desires, and therefore they are not sincere in their love of Truth, but are desirous that Truth should be just what they love, and therefore they readily embrace any argument or objection which they think makes for them. *They like not to retain God in their knowledge*, because their practice is disagreeable to his nature. Every vicious inclination which a man is resolved to pursue, is a strong bias upon his mind, either towards Infidelity, or at least towards such corrupt notions of the nature of God as insensibly lead men to it.

We have a very plain instance of this in that old *Epicurean* notion of a God, as of a Being *happy* indeed and eternal, but whose happiness consisted altogether in doing nothing, and being concerned for nothing. For they who placed the utmost of humane happiness in ease and indolence, and the pleasure of self-gratification, were easily drawn to believe the same of the divine happiness; and from thence to conclude, that there could not be any Providence of God which concerned itself with
the

10 SERMON I.

the affairs of the world; for all such concern would destroy its own ease and rest, and consequently its happiness. For it was a maxim with them, *Nisi quietum nihil beatum*; and again, as *Velleius* in *Tully* expresses their common sentiment, which, it's plain, had its original from their own love of ease and laziness of temper, *Nos autem beatam vitam in animi securitate, & in omnium vacatione munerum ponimus.*

2. As for those who are not so much under the power of their bodily appetites or passions, but that they can see the gross deformity of them, and how much they debase human nature when men are led by them, and are therefore ashamed of such a brutal life as visibly sinks them below the use of human Reason; yet even these men may have inward vices of the mind, which without a sincere and honest attention to the secret workings of their own hearts, may produce as perverse effects in their reasonings, and more incurable. For Infidelity may often arise from pride and self-conceit, which disposes men of parts and learning to an affectation of singularity and a desire of seeming wiser than other people, by maintaining paradoxes and contradicting all opinions that
are

S E R M O N I. II

are vulgarly received, for that very reason because they are so: And they that are of a lighter and vainer temper, and value themselves upon an appearance of wit in conversation, proceed sometimes to ridicule and laugh at things of the highest nature, instead of arguing soberly about them. That men's indulging this kind of temper in themselves has been a temptation to them to embrace Atheistical opinions in other polire ages and countries besides our own, is plain from what ^a*Plato* observed long ago, who when, in one of his Dialogues, he brings in *Clinias* disputing against Atheism from the common topicks of the beauty and harmony of the universe, the regular motions of the heavenly bodies, and the common notions of mankind, in which all nations *Greeks* and *Barbarians* agreed concerning a God and a Providence, makes an *Athenian* stranger reply to him, That he was afraid there were a set of ill men in the world who would despise and laugh at such old and common arguments. It may be, says he, that you who live here, remote from the city, may imagine that intemperance in pleasure and sensual lust is the only cause of such impiety; but there is another ground of
pleasure

^a Lib. 10. de Legibus, p. 886.

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It besides this, and that^b is a certain grievous ignorance pretending to the greatest wisdom. Plato knew that at Athens, the seat of wit and learning, there were some great pretenders to Philosophy, who maintained atheistical opinions upon a formed hypothesis contrary to the antient doctrine, and some no doubt set themselves up for wits upon that account, not that they really had any superiority of understanding above those that went before, but because they affected something that might distinguish them from the rest of the world, if it was only in point of novelty. We see that in other cases besides Religion, this temper often leads men to a spirit of contradiction, in the gratifying of which men may fall into very foul mistakes and absurdities themselves, while they imagine themselves to be only exposing and ridiculing the follies and absurdities of other people. And that the same temper may mislead men in respect of the principles of Religion, is more than probable from the manner of writing which those men generally pursue, who appear forwardest in the cause of infidelity. There does not often seem to be in them so great a concern for truth, as a desire

^b Ἀμαθία μάλα χαλεπὴ δοκῶσα εἶναι μεγίστη φρόνησις. *De legg.*
l. 10. p. 888. ed. Serrani.

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of shewing their own parts: nor are they ever so forward in laying down any consistent scheme of principles of their own, as in contradicting the most commonly received principles of others. They seem desirous of being taken for men of deeper reach than their neighbours, that are not to be imposed upon by vulgar opinions, but can spy the weakness or failure of those arguments which to others, that are more modest, have always appeared very convincing. A certain self-confidence, mix'd with a contempt of other men's understanding, is very apt to betray men into a wrong use of their reason, and to make them strike into odd and singular ways of thinking, only because they are new and contrary to that which others have chosen upon much better consideration; and we see that there is nothing so absurd but what if once started will find some profelytes for a while, if it be only for the novelty of it.

It has been thought by some, That the chief reason why all men assent to the truth of Mathematical demonstrations, when plainly proposed to them, is because none of those truths interfere with the interests, passions or inclinations of any man: because if they did, men concerned would find some pretence
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to evade the force of them. I will not affirm that this is the only reason of such universal assent to Geometrical conclusions; but the supposal however evidently allows, that some truths, which in their own nature are capable of sufficient proof, may be disbelieved or rejected through prejudice, or prepossession of interest or passion, or some partial or vicious disposition of mind in those to whom the proof is offered. It is certain, that what men do not like, they are very unwilling to understand, though they will not easily be brought to own this for the reason, but will always find out some colour or other to avoid the suspicion of such partiality.

But besides these personal indispositions of mind, which may give a strong bias towards Infidelity, there is one thing farther which appears to have great influence over some men's reasoning, even in the first principles of Religion, and that is

3. An inconsiderate and indistinguishing aversion to Superstition, which evil they think can never be effectually cured, but by destroying the very foundation of Religion itself. It is a very common practice, in many instances, for those that are grown weary of the folly and mischief of one extream, presently and without

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out consideration to betake themselves to the opposite, as if that were the only remedy, which yet in the end proves as bad or worse perhaps than the disease itself.

It is evident, from those high encomiums that the disciples and followers of *Epicurus* give their master, for his forming an *hypothesis* which would free them from superstition, that they were greatly biassed by this principle, or else they could not so easily have fallen in with so absurd an *hypothesis*, who were many of them otherwise men of better parts and more learning than *Epicurus* himself appears to have been. But the world being then greatly overrun with superstition, which often pass'd in common under the Name of Religion, they would not be at the pains to examine thoroughly the merits of each and make a just distinction. A man can hardly forbear thinking that those, who make such horrible outcries of the heavy yoke of superstition, even while they seem to include all reverence for a Deity under that name, had been some time or other of their lives greatly under the power of this evil, or that they had formerly been taught to worship some cruel Dæmon, which had left such dreadful impressions upon their imagination, as to make them

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them afraid of the thoughts of any invisible Being; and desirous to be persuaded, upon any terms, that there is no such thing: at least one cannot easily imagine, that those men ever had any just or true notion of a God, the most excellent and lovely of all Beings, who can so easily confound Religion and Superstition, as to think, that one of them cannot be admitted or discarded without the other. To be under the power of superstition is, no doubt, a very wretched state, and exposes men both to much wickedness and misery, if the mind be infected with it to any great degree: but it has its original not from Religion or a true sense of God, but from a false and perverse opinion of the Deity, or from taking something else for God which is not so. But it is a very uncomfortable cure for this evil to endeavour to banish the belief of the true God out of our minds. This way, in the Opinion of ^c*Plutarch* (in his Treatise of *Superstition*) is like unwarily avoiding robbers,

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^c Φόβου λέγειν ἐν αὐτῷ (δεισιδαιμονίαν) ἀσφαλῶς τε καὶ συμφερόντως, ἔχ' ὥστε οἱ ληστῶν ἢ θηρίων ἔφοδον ἢ πῦρ ἀπεριτκέπτης καὶ ἀλογίᾳ περιφύγοντες, ἐμπίπτουσιν εἰς ἀνοδίας βάραθρα καὶ κρημνὸς ἐχέσας· ἕτως γὰρ ἔτι οἱ φύγοντες τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν, ἐμπίπτουσιν εἰς ἀβέοτητα τραχέαν καὶ ἀντίτυπον, ὑπερπηδήσαντες ἐν μίᾳ καμμένῳ τὴν οὐδέειαν. *Plutarch. περὶ δεισιδαιμ. in fine.*

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or wild Beasts, or Fire, by running without consideration into a By-way full of gulfs and precipices. And yet he tells us that there were such men as took this extravagant course, and to avoid Superstition fell into obstinate Atheism, wholly passing over Religion which lies in the middle between these extreams. And I am afraid there are still such as split upon the same rock upon the same occasion.^d But I cannot say, that this pretence can justly have the same force with it, or plead the same Excuse now, that it might do under Heathen Superstition. For when there was very little true Knowledge of God among them, and much less any thing in all their worship that could plainly signify the Unity and perfection of the Divine Nature, but very much to mislead them to Polytheism and Idolatry, so that

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^d See the note upon Miscellaneous Reflections, p. 65. where we are told, " That if, from the Experience of many gross delusions of a superstitious kind, this fear begins to turn, 'tis natural for it to run, with equal violence a contrary way. The extream passion for religious objects passes into an aversion : and a certain horror and dread of imposture causes as great a disturbance as even imposture itself had done before. In such a situation as this, the mind may be easily blinded : as well in one respect as in the other. 'Tis plain both these disorders carry something with them which discovers us to be in some manner beside our reason, and out of the right use of judgment and understanding.

the greatest part of their Religion was the mere worship of Devils; it was much more difficult to spy the Truth through such a veil of Darkness. But now when juster notions of the Divine Perfections and Attributes are set before us, as it is more culpable to fall into such absurd Superstition, so it is more inexcusable to make the weakness and folly of superstitious people a pretence for throwing off all Religion.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew, that there may be other grounds of men's Infidelity, besides want of evidence, in the principles of Religion: And I have insisted the longer upon this, because whatever men may pretend, I am afraid they generally take up the conclusion, before they have thoroughly examined the premisses: that is, upon some prejudice in themselves, or some offence which they have taken at the weakness and folly of others, in the matter of Religion, they begin to doubt whether there be any truth at all in the matter, and then they hunt for arguments and objections to improve that doubting into a formed disbelief or settled infidelity.

II. I proceed, in the next place, to consider that the Principles of Religion are of that high nature, and universal concernment to mankind,
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that we cannot answer it to our own reason, to be unconcerned about them; and therefore as Rational creatures ought to endeavour to be satisfied about them. It cannot be a matter of indifference to us, to know whether they be true or false, without betraying very great folly and indiscretion. I do not as yet argue from that vast difference in our practical conduct, which ought to be the reasonable consequence of believing those principles true, in respect of what it may be supposing them altogether false, as such conduct may arise from the consideration of what we may expect from the hand of God, supposing him to be what even natural Religion teaches us, for this I shall have occasion to mention * afterwards. But I speak now of that use which we ought to make of our Reason and Understanding, supposing us left to our own conduct, and as yet knowing nothing of any superior Law to oblige or direct us: And even in this case,

It seems to be very reasonable, that every creature should make the best use of its own powers and faculties that it can, let those powers and faculties come from whence they will, from Chance or Design; and both to employ and improve them in the best manner

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* See *Serm. 3.*

they are able to their own well-being. And most other creatures do this, as far as we can judge, where there is not any other force to hinder them. Now if men have Reason and Understanding and a power of freely applying them to, and exercising them upon, different Subjects, some of which apparently tend more than others to the improving those faculties, and of rendring the best and most valuable part of our nature more perfect and compleat ; if we are in the least conscious of our abilities, to chuse how we will apply them, we cannot do our selves right without such application ; that is, *If it be in our power to chuse how we will employ our Reason and Thought, yet if we will not employ it upon what is proper to our nature, as reasonable creatures, we are then certainly culpable in making a wrong use of our powers ;* we are guilty to our selves and cannot be said to have done our best.

But if it should be alledged, that we have indeed no such power at all, but that all our reasonings, and the application of our thoughts this way or that way, are the mere effect of Matter and Motion casually working upon us, and that there is nothing voluntary in us, or any other Being whatsoever ; then I confess men cannot well be charged with either helping
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ing or hindring their own reasonings; and it would be in vain to go about to persuade them to think or reason about any thing of their own accord, or to tell them that they ought to take other methods of thinking than they do; since they have not any thoughts or reasonings at their own command. But yet however, they ought not to be angry with us, or take it amiss, if we do advise them, because upon such a supposition, we can no more help doing this, than they can help doing the other: That is, neither the one nor the other can think, or reason, or advise, or be advised, or take any thing well or ill otherwise than just as they do; and at this rate all Discourse and Reasoning whatever would be no more than the winds blowing, or waves beating one against another. And when men once come to this degree of absurdity, and will stick to it, I cannot see how it is possible to apply any cure to them from reason and argument. And yet to this absurdity they must come in the end, who will not allow any Principle in the world distinct from Matter and Motion; for a transverse declination of Atoms is no more Free-will, or a power of chusing and refusing, than their perpendicular descent.

But let it be allowed, that we have any power over our own actions, and can chuse which way we will apply our thoughts and reasonings, and determine our selves to this or that subject; if we are capable of any free *use of the understanding, in endeavouring to find out the meaning of any proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of the Evidence for and against it, and in judging of it according to the seeming force or weakness of the Evidence,* as those, who are pleased to call themselves Free-thinkers, ought to grant, since they make it the very Definition of Free-thinking, which they claim as their right; then if we would act like men, that can use this power, we ought to consider our own situation in the world, what rank and order we stand in, and what relation we bear to other Beings. The first and most natural thought should be how we came hither, and from whence we had those powers and faculties of mind which we have, or think we have. And since we may be very certain, that we did not make our selves, or bring our selves into this part of the world, or chuse this rank of Beings in which we are placed; whether we be pleased or displeased with being what we are, it is very reasonable for us to consider, whether

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ther we have any power to continue our selves in this condition, if we like it, or to alter and amend it, if we like it not. And if we also find that we have not any such ability as this absolutely at our command, we ought then to enquire farther, whether there be without us any other superior Power, which may be any way concerned with us, or for us, from whom we may expect or hope for assistance, upon application to it. And until we have made such enquiry, we cannot be said to have shewn any just concern for our own being, and consequently have not acted reasonably towards our selves, if we have the power of making such enquiry, and neglect to put it in practice.

Nay, farther, Suppose that we have not of our selves gone this reasonable way to work at first, but our thoughts have been carried away at random to other matters of less moment, without considering what was a proper employment for them; yet if only some of our fellow-creatures have told us accidentally, that they believe, or have heard, that there is some such superior Being as exercises a power over us; or suppose we our selves have had some casual suggestions about it in our own mind; or upon viewing the things without us, should at any time have been apt to suspect,

that some intelligent Being, besides mankind, and more powerful than man, might be concerned in it; (and surely there is no man, that ever arrived to the use of reason and discretion, but what must, one time or other, have had as much notice of the Being of a God, as this comes to, presented to his thoughts.) I say, supposing this, no man can excuse himself to his own reason, that would never in earnest examine, whether such inclination, suggestion or suspicion had any ground or foundation: there being no exercise of the mind more proper, because there is nothing in which a man's self, and whatever belongs to his well-being, as a reasonable creature, is more immediately concerned than this. All other speculations are foreign to us in respect of this; but this concerns our selves most intimately; and therefore, how much soever we may pity those, who, being sensible of the nature and tendency of the great Principles of Religion, **And** how much it imports mankind to be well assured whether they be true or no, do therefore labour seriously to find out the truth, but by entering into a wrong method of enquiry; cannot as yet arrive at any satisfaction about it, but are full of doubts and scruples, which they endeavour to have cleared up by the best infor-

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information they can procure: Yet for those who willingly chuse to employ themselves upon any other enquiry that comes in their way, rather than this; not because they are already satisfied about this, but because they care not whether ever they be, and therefore are as indifferent and unconcerned, about knowing whether there be a God or a future State of their own Souls, as they are whether the Moon or other Planets be inhabited; one can hardly tell how to bear such a proceeding, without indignation at so great an abuse of their reason; and a man had need to have all the compassion which the Christian Religion teaches us, to be earnestly concerned for those who can even boast of their being so wilfully unconcerned for themselves.

The remaining considerations (which will farther enforce this) I shall reserve to the next opportunity.

*Now unto the King eternal, immortal,
invisible, the only wise God, be ho-
nour and glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.*



S E R M O N II.

Preached *February* the 4th 17¹⁶₁₇.

Heb. iii. 12.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.



IN my former discourse, upon this subject, I proposed to apply myself chiefly to such as deny or dispute against the common Principles of Religion, not only Christian but Natural, and such as think it a very innocent or indifferent matter, either to believe them or not believe them, as it shall happen, as having respect only to their present convenience, and not thinking themselves concerned about

about any future consequences: And my design was to endeavour to persuade them from common reason, that it is their duty not to be unconcerned in the case, and let the matter go at random, without troubling their heads about it, but to give the arguments that have been, or may be offered in behalf of the principles of Religion, a fair, serious and impartial hearing and examination: And in order to this, I desired that the following particulars might be considered without prejudice.

I. That there may be other probable causes of Infidelity often assigned, besides want of evidence, for the matter proposed to be believed, even when this is pretended as an excuse for it; because it is evident, that in all other cases men's interests, passions, or other indispositions, will prevent them from seeing the force of an argument, which is in its own nature very good, and sufficient to convince another man, that is not so indisposed.

II. That the principles of Religion are of that high nature and universal concernment to mankind, that we cannot answer it to our own Reason to be unconcerned about them; and therefore that we must, as rational creatures, endeavour to be well satisfied one way
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or other about them. To find out the truth in this case is the most proper employment of our reason and understanding.

III. That if we have sufficient reason to believe the great principles of Religion; such as the Being of a God, and a Providence, and a future State, &c. our unbelief will not excuse us from being criminal in the sight of God.

IV. That it is unreasonable for any man to endeavour to persuade others out of the principles of Religion, till he himself is first evidently convinced that they are false, and disadvantageous to mankind.

V. That it is still more unreasonable to make them the subject of raillery and ridicule.

The two first of these are what I have already spoken to, and shall now proceed to the third, *viz.*

III. That if we have sufficient reason to believe the great principles of Religion, such as the Being of a God and a Providence, and a future state after this life, &c. Our unbelief will not excuse us from being criminal in the sight of God. I have already shewn, that we are indeed culpable to our selves and inexcusable to our own reason, if we make no enquiry

quiry into those things in which our own state and condition is so nearly concerned: and we act against our nature, as we are reasonable beings, when we are unconcerned about them. The thing that I would now consider is, whether if we have sufficient arguments laid before us, to prove the Being and Attributes of God, provided we make an honest and impartial use of our own reason and understanding, we may not be obliged at our own peril to attend to them. That is, supposing God to be the sovereign Governor of the world, and to take notice of all the actions and dispositions of men, and to have given them laws, either naturally arising from the constitution of things, or revealed from himself, and to have set up a standing proof of such his being; whether all rational creatures, that are capable of knowing him, be not under such a natural obligation to take notice of him, that they may be justly made to suffer, *i. e.* may be punished for their neglect of it. And this I think may be consistent with the highest reason; and disbelief may be criminal, where the motives to believe are sufficient to convince any honest mind, and such as no man can be ignorant of without some previous fault of his own will, and the things offered to our belief such as every man must
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necessarily own himself to be concerned in.

St. *Paul* speaking of the *Gentile* world who had revolted from the true knowledge of God, and become vain in their imaginations and reasonings about him, having laid down this as a principle, that, *That which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God hath shewed it unto them; for the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead*: Concludes from thence, that *they were without excuse, because that when they knew God, i. e. had such evident natural means of knowing him, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, &c.* I do not here urge this passage of St. *Paul*, as of an inspired writer, by way of Authority to decide the point in hand: but I produce it only as an argument from reason and the nature of the thing, which carries its own weight along with it, abstracted from any superior authority; and the plain sense of the argument is this, That if God hath shewed sufficient evidence of his own Being and Power, unto all men from the frame of things, they are without excuse who take no notice of him, nor acknowledge any dependence upon him: and

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consequently, if he be a law-giver and a judge (as has been universally allowed by those who own'd him, as the maker and governor of the world) he must make a difference between those who act in conformity to the nature of things, freely owning their natural state of subjection to him, and those who renounce such order of subjection: and he may deal with those men as offenders, who disown his Authority by bringing his Being into question. Acts of unbelief being indeed no other (in this case) than acts of wilful disobedience, where the evidences of his Being are so plain, that it must be the fault of the Will and not of the Understanding, if we be not moved by them; affected ignorance will be no excuse in such a case, where the means of information are so obvious.

It is well known, that there have been some of late years among us, who have publickly set themselves to weaken the force of this argument, by insinuating, that if a man should be supposed to incur any penalty from the hand of God for want of any belief, though it were even that of his own Being, it would be a great diminution to that entire Freedom of thinking, which they pretend God has made the natural right of every man, and which it cannot be consistent with

with his goodness thus to abridge. And they farther tell us, that ^a *a man may possess his Soul in peace, as having an expectation of enjoying all the good things which God can bestow, and no fear of any future misery, or evil, from his hands; and the very worst of his state can only be, that he is pleasantly deceived.* Now if these patrons of *Free-thinking* (as they desire to be called) would keep honestly to their own definition of *Free-thinking*, and mean no more by it than only ^b *the use of the understanding, in endeavouring to find out the meaning of any proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of the evidence for and against it, and in judging of it according to the seeming force or weakness of the evidence;* I know no man of understanding and integrity that could justly oppose such freedom. For it will readily be granted by all, that ^c *men whose understandings, must have more sense than they who use them not:* for they are improved by use and application, as other faculties are: and I have before observed, that we are under a natural obligation, even to our own reason, to make the best use and improvement of them that we

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^a V. *Free-thinking*, p. 38.

^b p. 5.

^c p. 120.

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can. But if instead of defending men's right to use their understandings; under the name of *Free thinking*, they are pleased to call any odd or extravagant opinion *Free thinking*, provided it be but contrary to those which are commonly received; a man must use his understanding very untowardly, that can believe this consistent with the definition. For if, as these authors seem to allow (whether sincerely or not I will not now examine) *“The knowledge of some truths be required of us by God, and if the knowledge of others be useful to society,* then certainly the holding at all adventures, and without any serious examination, assertions contradictory to such truths or inconsistent with them, cannot be any instance of such *free-thinking* as we have a right to, but either want of thinking or an abuse of it.

I am very ready to acknowledge, that God has never obliged us to know or believe any truth, but what he has given us some previous means of knowing, or sufficient ground of believing: but then on the other hand he may certainly, without any impeachment of his goodness, oblige us to use those means honestly, and require a sincere love of truth from us. He may, in order to our own happiness, forbid
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pride and self-conceit, and affectations of singularity; and enjoin us to lay aside malice and envy, and to see that no undue prejudice or partiality mix themselves in our searches of truth. He that allows us to reason freely, may certainly command us to reason justly and attend to proper and competent arguments to prove any truth which he requires us to know, and to be moved by rational inducements to believe. And in what way soever he condescends to teach us, we ought to be ready to be informed. Now these authors grant that *“to be informed consists in being made to think justly and truly of things; and to be obliged to this in the application of our reason, is no more contrary to the free use of our understanding, than obliging us to the practice of virtue and morality is to the freedom of our wills. To think freely in the finding out any truth requires, not that we should think or judge of it just what we please, but that we should consider impartially the nature of the evidence for and against it; and when we have all the light we can procure, then to be determined by superior evidence. But to contradict a truth, without enquiring*

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into it, only because it is vulgarly received, when to a considering man there is good evidence for it, is not free-thinking but bondage of thought. For a man's reasoning may be as much bound and his thinking as much biaſſed by taking a prejudice againſt any thing, as for it; and he thinks juſt as freely, that takes all current opinions for true, as he that takes them all for falſe; that is indeed neither the one nor the other. In truths which are capable of ſufficient proof, either Moral or Mathematical, he ought not to be accounted a *Free-thinker* who at the firſt appearance boldly denies them before he has conſidered the evidence. For inſtance, Suppoſe any man not entered in Mathematicks, upon viewing a great variety of Triangles and other figures, ſhould take a fancy to deny *that the three angles of any triangle are equal to two right angles, or to the three angles of any other triangle*, becauſe he will not give himſelf the trouble of conſidering the demonſtration, ſuch a practice would hardly be called freedom of reaſoning, but want of it. When Mr. *Hobbes*, * who is alledged for an inſtance of Free-thinking, pretended with great confidence to have demonſtrated the quadrature of a circle, thoſe who
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* *ib. p. I.*

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had thought more freely and were better able to judge of the matter, thought that his *fastus* and self-conceit had hindred his thinking from being so free and impartial in the case as it ought to have been, though he thought fit to write *Contra fastum professorum Geometriæ*. He whose thoughts are justest, and most according to the nature of things, is the truest *Free-thinker*, and it is not the open profession of every wild and incoherent fancy which comes into a man's head, that is fit to denominate him such. For Thinking, even according to their own definition, implies Reasoning but the affirming any proposition without just ground or the denying any proposition at a venture without examining, or the refusing such assent as the nature of the evidence requires, is not Reasoning, and therefore not Thinking, much less free-thinking according to the definition. For, according to these authors, *What is a restraint of free-thinking on any subject, but somewhat which hinders me from thinking on that subject?* 'Tis no matter therefore whether the hindrance be from without or from within, provided I am hindred. But I believe the greatest and most insuperable hindrances to freedom of thinking

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and reasoning, are such as men put themselves under, by indulging their pride or their passions, their pleasure or their sloth. *Free-thinking* (as these Authors allow^s) *requires great diligence and application of mind; and he that applies himself to it, must, by that habit, expel all those vicious dispositions and passions, by which every man out of action is tossed and governed;* therefore they that will not be at the pains first to free themselves from all those vicious dispositions, which hinder them from being impartial and sincere in their searches of truth, do in vain arrogate to themselves the specious title of *Free-thinkers*; which indeed would be a Title of honour, if it were applied to none but those who truly deserve it, by a free and ingenuous use of their reason in the finding out of truth, and honestly submitting to it when found. But when it is applied to those who have no other pretence to it, except the assuming a liberty of denying the plainest truths, and reducing all reason to downright scepticism; we cannot but then think the name has lost much of its reputation by being so misapplied.

True liberty of action does not consist in
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doing what we please without any controul, but in being free from all outward force, to govern our selves by the law of reason; and he is no more free than is the slave of his own passions, than he that is under subjection to the mere will of another man. So freedom of thinking does not consist in an ability to dissent from the principles of reason, but in being superior to all those prejudices, either from our selves or others, which hinder us from assenting to them. If therefore God hath given us such a liberty, he may, with the highest reason, make us responsible to himself for the use of it: and to suppose that we are so responsible is not to deny this freedom, but to assert it; because if we had it not we could not be answerable for the abuse of it. Now upon this foundation, we are not only allowed, but obliged, to enquire into the grounds of Religion, and bring them to a fair and impartial examination: and the reason why God Almighty may justly condemn us for our infidelity is, because, if we use this freedom honestly, we cannot fail of seeing sufficient reason to convince us. Whatever evil consequences therefore are threatned to those that will not believe, they are not designed to hinder our freedom of enquiry into the grounds of

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our belief, but to excite our diligence, and secure our integrity, in enquiring. If the evidence of a supreme Being that governs the world, and some other first principles of Religion, be such as will not force it self upon us without our own attention, that there may be something voluntary in our faith; but yet be such as cannot, without a manifest wilful misuse of our understanding, be withstood when attended to, it must be *an evil heart of unbelief* that departs *from the living God*. And the natural consequences of such departure may be very miserable; and what they will be we may with most certainty learn from himself. Upon this principle the Christian Religion, though it condemns those that wilfully refuse to hearken to it, yet, conscious of its own truth and sincerity, it freely offers it self to the strictest scrutiny, and commands us *to prove all things in order to hold fast that which is good*: which two are no ways inconsistent with one another. For where an impartial enquiry will necessarily lead us to the acknowledgment of a fundamental truth, there the owning of that truth may as justly be the subject of a command, as the sincere use of the means leading to it; and God may punish the perverseness of our wills in one case, as well as the other.

I shall

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I shall not at present urge this point any farther, because I may have occasion ^h hereafter to say something upon the like argument; when I come to shew that we may lie under a natural obligation to the belief of a God, and may make our selves incapable of receiving any good from him by a denial of his Being.

Therefore I proceed now in the next place to consider;

IV. That it is unreasonable for any man to endeavour to persuade others out of the principles of Religion, till he himself is first evidently convinced that they are false; and disadvantageous to mankind. I do not hereby mean that a man, who has any real doubts or scruples in his mind concerning the validity of any argument, even for the principal points of Religion, should not have liberty fairly to propose his doubts to such as have ability to judge of them, in order to have the matter freely debated, and thereby set in the clearest light: for this may be part of a just and necessary inquiry towards the full satisfaction of a man's own mind. And I am well persuaded, that

^h See *Serm. the 9th.*

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that such an ingenuous liberty would never do any harm to true Religion, which is never afraid of a fair and impartial trial. And therefore I am not now begging quarter for the principles of Religion, as if I were afraid that these men had some unanswerable arguments which, if known, would quite destroy those principles: but my meaning is, that no man can pretend a right, without breaking in upon the liberties of other people, to go about openly to persuade others to that, of which he himself is not fully persuaded. And if this were granted, I believe that those who dispute in favour of Atheistical principles would be reduced to a small number. For however odd and singular some men may love to appear, in their reasonings with others; yet if we could come at their secret thoughts of the matter at all their different hours, I do not question but we should find, that they have many secret misgivings in their minds upon their own profest arguments; however they may outwardly seem to bear up against such inward doubts or fears.

The Epicurean poet himself fairly owns this, when he tells us, that *i though there are some*
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ⁱ Nam quòd sæpe homines morbos magis esse timendos,
 Infamemq; ferunt vitam quàm tartara leti,

S E R M O N II. 43

men who openly profess not to be afraid of future punishment so much as of a fit of sickness, as knowing the Soul to be mortal, and needing no farther argument to prove it; yet it may be observed, that this is all rather pretence and affectation, than any real persuasion from the truth of the thing. For let the same men be banished from human society for any crime, and they presently become the most miserable creatures, and fall to the most abject superstition. In times of adversity men's minds are most sensibly affected towards Religion: in such times therefore a man's real sentiments are to be known, when the inmost truth will break out, and he can no longer personate what he really is not.

This

Et se scire animi naturam sanguinis esse,
 Nec prorsum quidquam nostræ rationis egere;
 Hinc licet advortas animum magis omnia laudis,
 Aut etiam vetiti (si fert ita forte voluntas)
 Jactari causa, quam quod res ipsa probetur;
 Extorres iidem patriâ, longeque fugati
 Conspectu ex hominum fœdati crimine turpi,
 Omnibus ærumnis adfecti denique vivunt;
 Et quocunque tamen miseri venere, parentant,
 Et nigras mactant pecudes & manibus divinis
 Inferias mittunt; multoque in rebus acerbis
 Acrius advortunt animos ad Religionem.
 Quo magis in dubiis hominem spectare periculis
 Convenit, advorsisque in rebus noscere quid sit.
 Nam veræ voces tum demum pectore ab imo
 Ejiciuntur; & eripitur persona, manet res.

Lucret. lib. 3. v. 41.

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This free confession, from one whose profest design it was to destroy entirely all belief of a Providence, plainly shews, that there are very strong propensions in human nature to the belief of invisible powers, and of a future account, which cannot easily be destroyed; and which therefore have a deeper foundation in the nature of things than some men are willing to own: and though men strive to root them out at some seasons, and in some companies; yet at other times they cannot prevent their springing up again in their own minds. And indeed we plainly find, that most of those very men who designedly set themselves to overthrow the force of all other men's arguments, for the being of a God and his Providence; yet when they themselves come to reason in earnest about it, of their own accord, they generally bring themselves to own it in effect, upon some principle or other of their own establishing, which perhaps in reality has not so much weight in it, as those which they despise because they are common. This shews, that though their pride and self-conceit make them willing to decry the reasonings of all other men, yet they are no ways inwardly satisfied with the contrary conclusion. They can of themselves see the absurdity

S E R M O N II. 45

furdity of denying the Existence of such a Being, though they quarrel with the premises upon which any other men endeavour to prove it. Now this proceeding is what may be justly complained of, that men should go about by all ways to weaken the belief of that in others, which they themselves, at the bottom, either own to be true, or at least are not fully satisfied of the contrary. This would hardly be thought fair and equal dealing in any other case; and much less should it be so in this, which is of the utmost concern to all men. It is an unreasonable practice in respect of God Almighty, supposing him to be; and in respect of men, supposing them to believe his Being. For,

I. Suppose it be true, that there is a God and a Providence, and that these men are not so hardy, as to pretend absolutely to demonstrate the contrary; it may be that he is such a governour of the world as is with all a King or magistrate, a Lawgiver, and judge of men's actions, as the generality of men do, in some respect or other, own him to be. Now if I go about to weaken men's belief of his Being, or to argue against it, what am I doing all the while but seducing them, as much as I can, from that natural allegiance which they think
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they owe him? I am certainly destroying his Title, if I am either making his Being uncertain, or persuading men that he has no such relation to them, or concern for them. Supposing then it were not yet known, what punishment he would inflict upon such seducers, yet certainly they could not but of themselves think it reasonable, that he should treat them in a different manner from his faithful subjects. Though his goodness be infinite, as no doubt it is, yet it cannot but look upon such men as criminal; and the greater his goodness is, the more criminal it is to abuse it, and to withdraw others from it. This makes it an unreasonable practice in respect of God Almighty. But,

2. In respect of men, who are supposed to believe his Being, it is unreasonable, because unless we are very sure that they are under a delusion, and that we can certainly better their condition by undeceiving them, we act very unkindly and uncharitably towards them, in trying to persuade them that they are deceived in an opinion or belief of that Being, on which they think their chief happiness depends.

A certain author, who is not generally thought to have any prejudice or partiality in
favour

SERMON II. 47

favour of revealed Religion, owns, ^k *It is impossible that any but an ill-natured man can wish against the Being of a God, for this is wishing against the publick, and even against one's own private good too, if rightly understood*: Now certainly, what cannot be wish'd against without great ill-nature towards mankind, cannot be attempted to be disproved with any good-natured design towards such as really believe it. For if it really be an happiness to mankind that there is a God, the present sense of that happiness must, in a great measure, depend upon their knowing or believing that there is one. Upon which account I cannot but wonder at another saying * of the same author, which seems to contradict the former. That, *as Religion stands amongst us, there are a great many good people, who would have less fear in being exposed, (to forlorn nature and a fatherless world) and would be easier perhaps in their minds if they were assured they had only mere Chance to trust to. For no body trembles to think there should be no God, but rather that there should be one.* But certainly every good man would tremble to think he had been thus deceived

^k Letter of Enthusiasm, p. 35.

* Pag. 40.

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deceived in all his expectations. This thought would be more terrible to him, than the prospect of losing the kindest and best parent in the world in the most helpless condition; for do what he will he can never be secure against any kind of misery, where Chance alone governs all things. So that a rational creature cannot be easy under the apprehension of being so exposed any way, but by thinking as little as possible of his own circumstances, that is, by divesting himself of reason and thought. But under the conduct of an infinitely wise, and good and powerful Being, he may be sure that no real harm can befall him without his own fault. And therefore if a man were even fully persuaded in his own mind, that there is no God, yet so long as he knows, that the belief of him is what all good men may take comfort in, it would be a very spiteful and ill-natured thing to endeavour to rob them of this comfort, without proposing something better and more certain. But when he can pretend to no such full persuasion himself, but only to be doubtful or sceptical in the matter, to attempt the same thing is intolerable. They who are weak enough to imagine, that the principles of Religion have no real foundation, but were at first invented by
wise

SERMON II. 49

wise men for the good government of the world and to keep mankind in order, are thereby obliged to acknowledge their usefulness to the well-being of humane society. And therefore, even upon their own supposition, it would be unreasonable for them to weaken the force of those principles, if they consulted either the good of others or themselves, unless they could propose some other method which would evidently have a more universal good effect. It would certainly be their wisest way to keep this secret to themselves, if they were sure they had it; but when they are not sure, it is both foolish and malicious to pretend to persuade others that they have it. And upon the whole I cannot but think it a reasonable caution, which *Tully* puts into the mouth of *Balbus* the *Stoic*, in the conclusion of his argument for Providence, that *it is an evil and impious custom to dispute against the Being of a God, whether it be done in earnest or only in pretence and affectation.*

This leads me to consider in the last place,

V. That it is still more unreasonable to make these principles of Religion the subject

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of

¹ Mala enim & impia consuetudo est contra Deos disputandi, sive ex animo id fit, sive simulatè. *De Nat. Dscr. in fine.*

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of raillery and ridicule. For whatever may be pretended by those who sometimes dispute against Religion, that they do it to excite others to the more vigorous defence of it, and to clear up any arguments that may be doubtful or obscure: Nothing of this kind can be alledged in favour of jesting upon it or ridiculing it; because this is treating it as not fit to be seriously considered. For no man of sense ever treats that with ridicule which he does not either think contemptible, or design to make so. Wherever the life or estate, or very great interest of any man is concerned, a man of an ordinary capacity will naturally say, such a thing is no *jesting matter*. Now certainly, the Being of a God and a future Judgment, and the like, are things of vastly more moment to those who believe them, than the greatest worldly interest can be, and this even they, that pretend not to believe them cannot but know; and therefore if they had no other reason to restrain them, yet even Decency and respect to the common sentiments of mankind should make them forbear such unseasonable jesting.

I know there are some that think it a plausible plea which is offered in excuse of this
Pra-

SERMON II. 51

Practice, when it said that ^m “ *Ridicule* is
 “ the proper test of what is serious, because
 “ a subject that will not bear raillery is sus-
 “ picious, just as a jest that will not bear a seri-
 “ ous examination is false wit ; and that
 “ which can be shewn only in a certain light,
 “ is questionable. Truth ’tis supposed may
 “ bear all lights, and one of those principal
 “ lights or natural Mediums, by which things
 “ are to be viewed, in order to a thorough re-
 “ cognition, is ridicule it self, or that manner
 “ of proof by which we discern whatever is
 “ liable to just raillery in any subject. From
 hence they would insinuate, “ that true Reli-
 “ gion can never suffer by this method, though
 “ imposture may. That ridicule, if it be
 “ wrong placed, will recoil upon itself, and
 “ be its own Corrector in the end, and so it
 “ may without any harm be freely left to take
 “ its course.” And as an instance of this it
 is alledged, that ⁿ *the divinest man that had*
appeared ever in the heathen world was, in
the height of witty times and by the wittiest of
all Poets, most abominably ridiculed in a
whole Comedy writ and acted on purpose

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But

^m Vid. *Essay on the Freedom of wit and humour*, p. 61, &c.

ⁿ *Letter concerning Enthusiasm*, p. 31.

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But so far was this from sinking his reputation, or suppressing his Philosophy, that they both increased the more for it; and he apparently grew to be more the envy of other Teachers. He was not only contented to be ridiculed, but, that he might help the Poet as much as possible, he presented himself openly in the Theatre, that his real figure (which was no advantagious one) might be compared with that which the witty Poet had brought as his representative on the Stage. Such was his good humour. Nor could there be in the world a greater testimony of the invincible goodness of the man, or a greater demonstration that there was no imposture either in his character or opinions. This is thought a specious plea for the freedom of this kind of wit upon all subjects.

But now granting, that Truth itself cannot suffer by such usage, for what is true cannot be made false by being ridicul'd, yet certainly it may lose very much of that good effect which it might otherwise have upon the minds of men, by being thus treated.

Those with whom we are now arguing will readily allow, that all Men are not competent Judges of wit, nor can at the first appearance, without examination, distinguish between what
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SERMON II. 53

is ridiculed and what really deserves to be so. And therefore, though a man by unseasonable jesting upon a wrong subject, may in the end make himself truly ridiculous, yet to those who cannot presently discern the false wit, the subject itself in the mean time appears contemptible, and much mischief may be done before the proper cure can be applied. And of this the case of *Socrates*, now alledged, and the pernicious effect this kind of wit had, in bringing him unjustly to death, is a very plain instance. For when those who designed his ruine durst not attempt it in the way of a publick accusation, because of the great esteem which men of virtue and understanding had for him, till they had first prepared the populace to bear it, they hired ° *Aristophanes* to use all his wit to expose him upon the Stage in a Comedy, after the most ludicrous manner ; which he was the more easily induced to do, because *Socrates* (though a person of as much true wit and good humour as any man of his age, yet) had always expressed a great aversion to that scurrilous and illiberal sort of wit, for which *Aristophanes* valued himself. And thus when they had, by means of

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° *Vid. Æliani Var. Hist. l. 2. cap. 13.*

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the Poet, made the Philosopher and his doctrine the object of scorn and contempt, among the deluded people, they could then successfully prosecute their villanous intentions against him.

I grant indeed, that afterwards, when the people came to themselves, they dearly repented of this delusion: and that this usage in *the end proved the highest advantage to that character and doctrine, which having stood the proof were found so solid and just.* But what is this to the purpose? Is this practice the more commendable, because Truth and sincerity will be able to stand the shock of it? Is a malicious piece of wit, or a false accusation, ever the more innocent, because the integrity and reputation of him who is thus attack'd will after tryal shine the brighter? What some of those who look upon themselves as the only polite writers may think, I cannot tell; but a man of plain and ordinary understanding must needs take this for a very odd way of defending what they call the *Freedom of wit and humour upon all subjects*; especially by one who had before told us, *He never heard that the antient Heathens were so well advised in their ill purpose of suppressing*

pressing the Christian Religion in its first rise, as to make use at any time of this (Bart'lemew-fair) method: But he is persuaded of this, that had the truth of the Gospel been any way surmountable, they would have bid much fairer for the silencing it, if they had chose to bring our primitive founders upon the stage in a pleasanter way than that of bear-skins and pitch-barrels; and he is apt to think, that if the Jews had tried their wit and malice this way against our Saviour and his Apostles, they might possibly have done our Religion more harm than by all their other ways of severity.

This it seems is allowed to be the most probable way of doing mischief to Religion, but the tryal of it is recommended, because Truth will in the end be superior to it. And whether any other wicked method of abusing or suppressing truth may not be defended upon the same principle, That *great is Truth and will prevail*, I may leave to any man's consideration. However, that we may not wrong this Author, it must be owned, that he sometimes speaks of treating *Religion with good manners*, and ^r tells us, he writes in *de-*

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^r *Essay on the Freedom of wit and humour*, p. 75, 76.

fence only of that sort of freedom which is taken among gentlemen and friends, who know one another perfectly well; and though as to what passes in select company, where friends meet knowingly, and with that very design of exercising their wit and looking freely into all subjects, he sees no pretence for any one to be offended at the way of rail-lery and humour, which is the very life of such conversation; yet he owns that to start questions, or manage debates which offend the publick ear, is to be wanting in that respect which is due to common society, and that such subjects should either not be treated at all in publick, or in such a manner as to occasion no scandal or disturbance; that the publick is not on any account to be laughed at, to its face, and that the lovers of mankind respect and honour conventions and societies of men, more than this comes to.

Now it would be some happiness, if these witty Gentlemen would be persuaded to contain themselves within such bounds. But that I am afraid will be very difficult, since if the plea before mentioned, in defence of Ridicule, have any weight in it, it will certainly carry them much farther. And indeed, we seldom find any of those, who think they have abundance

dance of wit, fit to be exercised on all subjects, but they are very impatient of having it confined to so narrow a compass. It would be almost as easy to persuade some men, that they want wit, as to prescribe them such limits in the use of it. The truth is, though one would think it but a very reasonable request, that men should forbear making a jest of any serious argument, especially in matters of great moment, till they have by fair reasoning shewn it to be absurd or ridiculous; yet generally speaking, these bold sort of Jesters take the contrary method; they make use of scoffing and ridicule as a crutch to supply their defect of true arguments, or as a cover to keep their false ones from being seriously examined. But to conclude this matter, if men would really act according to the principles of reason, or the rules of decency, or a just concern even for their own reputation among considerate men, they would not venture to treat the principles of Religion in a manner so unbecoming the nature of the thing, and so highly offensive to all that believe it; and above all, for any thing they can know to the contrary, so infinitely dangerous to themselves in the issue, if it be really true. And such I hope

hope it will appear to all impartial enquirers after truth, when it comes to be fairly examined.

And thus I have gone through those several considerations which I proposed at first, not as a proof of the truth and certainty of the principles of Religion, but as a preparative towards the sincere and impartial weighing and examining of them. For I am fully persuaded, if this could but be obtained, infidelity might soon be convinced of its own weakness, since the strength of it lies not so much in real argument as in unreasonable prejudice.

The summ therefore of what I would earnestly recommend; to all those who desire to find the truth in matters of Religion, is Sincerity of heart. Let them seriously and honestly examine their own hearts in the first place, before they offer to judge of the evidence; whether there be not in them any latent prejudice against Religion, any secret wish or desire that it may not be true, because of its crossing some favourite passion or vicious inclination, which they would willingly pursue without controul; whether there
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be nothing of inward pride or self-conceit, which makes them affect an opinion, because it is singular or new, or reject one because it is old or vulgar; and whether they have not taken unreasonable offence at all Religion, because of the abuses that have been made of it, and to avoid one extreme, have without consideration run into another: Because any of these, or the like prejudices, will certainly indispose them towards the sincere search of truth; and will make both the arguments and objections appear very different from what they really are.

Purity of heart is the surest way to see God, even in this sense of seeing him.

And that there may not be found in any of us *an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*, may that Supreme Being grant unto us *All*.



SERMON



S E R M O N I I I .

Preached *March* the 4th 1717.



Heb. xi. 6.

But without Faith it is impossible to please God: For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is 'a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.



THE great design of the Apostle in this whole Chapter, is to set forth the nature and effects of *Faith*, which, as we are told in the first verse, is *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, i. e.* it is a firm

a firm persuasion of mind concerning the truth of something future, which we hope for, and expect will hereafter come to pass: and a conviction of the real existence of some things, which are either in their own nature invisible to bodily eyes, or which, at least to us, cannot at present be seen, because they are at a distance in respect of place or of time, past or future. And by this, he says, *the elders obtained a good report*: That is, by virtue of this belief of an invisible principle, and a persuasion of the reality of things not subject to sense, those who lived in the earlier ages of the world, behaved themselves so towards the Supreme Being, and towards their fellow-creatures, with whom they conversed, that their names were thought fit to be transmitted to posterity for their piety and virtue, in that Revelation which God was afterwards pleased to make of his will: and therefore the instances, that are most particularly insisted on, are of those who lived before any written Revelation, and were governed by these first and natural principles of Religion; though by keeping to them, they had sometimes particular discoveries of the will of God vouchsafed to them, in this Chapter therefore we have, as it were, the first elements of Religious faith laid down
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and exemplified, in the practice and behaviour of those whose lives were influenced by it.

The first instance which he gives of Faith, is a general belief of the Creation of the world, by which we understand or conceive in our minds, that by the sole power and command of a supreme Being, whom we call God, the world it self, and all that belongs to it was at first brought into being, so that the things which are now seen were made, but not out of things which did appear; that which had no being by an Almighty power began to be. The manner in which this was done, was in its own nature invisible to human sight, other things being first brought into being before mankind existed; and it is impossible to have it now represented over again to us. But however, from what we do see, or from some other reasonings about our own existence, or otherwise, we do believe an invisible Maker and Governour of the world. *Through faith we understand, that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

The next instance of Faith, is a belief of God's having a regard to the actions of men, and their behaviour both towards him
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and towards one another, according to the difference of which he has a different respect towards them, and their intended worship of him; as in the case of *Abel* and *Cain*, one of which, by reason of this belief, offered a sacrifice more acceptable to God than the other. *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it, he being dead yet speaketh, i. e.* his blood crying for vengeance or recompence for the loss of life, to God, who had accepted his gifts, and declared him righteous, teaches us to believe, that notwithstanding he was unjustly slain, and his wicked brother survived, yet God will make a difference between the innocent sufferer and the guilty murderer. His approbation or disapprobation shall not be in vain, though we do not presently see the effects of them; which doctrine the case of *Abel* does as it were preach to all future generations.

The third instance of Faith here given, is a belief of some Reward to be received from the hand of God in another life, for our obedience to him in this, and our living according to his will, by what means soever it be manifested unto us; as in the case of *Enoch*, who, though he

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he knew that righteous *Abel* was murdered by his wicked brother, notwithstanding God's testifying of his works that he approved them, yet was not tempted to think worse of Providence for all that, nor discouraged from a religious obedience; because he was fully persuaded, that however it might succeed with him in this life, yet God would certainly take care of him, and make it up to him in the next. And according to this faith so it happened to him, in a most remarkable manner, sufficient to convince all that knew it, of the certainty of that life which he believed. *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, [any more upon earth] because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.* And with respect to the two foregoing instances, though more particularly, as it should seem, to the latter of them, the Apostle adds the observation in the Text: *But without faith it is impossible to please God. i. e.* without believing the first principles of Religion, it is impossible that any man should be capable of receiving such testimony from God, as either *Enoch* or *Abel* had done: *For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is*

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a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, i.e.

He that makes any religious addressees to a supreme Being, or proposes to have any intercourse with him, or thinks that he stands in any relation to him, so as to be capable of receiving any thing from him, must necessarily believe the existence of such a Being, and that he shall be the better for making such application to him. But this he can have no great ground to hope for, unless he be persuaded that this supreme Being, or God, takes care of human affairs, and observes human actions, and will, some way or other, reward those that behave themselves well, either in this life or another; and if he plainly see, that good men are not always rewarded in this life, he will from hence be induced to believe, that there is another life after this intended for them. And though he be not as yet perfectly acquainted with the manner how this shall be, yet he can safely trust to that wisdom, and power, and goodness, which he is persuaded belongs to him, who is the Maker and Governour of all things.

That the belief of God's existence is necessarily supposed in all those, who willingly, and *ex animo*, shew any sort of veneration or respect towards such a Being, is a thing so self-evident,

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evident, that no man can ever seriously go about to deny it. Even *Epicurus* himself, though he denied all Providence, yet was forced to own some sort of Excellent and Happy Beings, whom he called Gods, that he might have some pretence for complying with the outward expressions of veneration and worship, used among those with whom he lived; though he founded the decency or fitness of this veneration, ^a only upon the Excellency of the nature of Gods above men, and not upon any concern that they had, or could have, for mankind upon his principle.

But they who go no farther than this cannot, in any just sense, be said to *come unto God*, they cannot, consistently with their *hypothesis*, either ask any thing of him, or expect any thing from him, while they believe him not to be concerned for mankind. And therefore *Tully* makes even *Cotta* the Academic, (whose province it was, not to own the same certainty or assurance in those matters, which the other sects of Philosophers did) yet plainly to condemn this hypothesis, as the

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^a Nec metuimus eos, quos intelligimus nec sibi fingere ullam molestiam, nec alteri quærere: Et piè sancteq; colimus naturam excellentem atque præstantem, ---says *Velieus* in behalf of the Epicurean worship, in *Tully De N. D. lib. I. cap. 20.*

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ruin of all Piety and Religion ; ^b “ For why,
 says he, “ should the Gods be worshipped by
 “ men, if they are so far from having any
 “ care or concern for them, that they con-
 “ tinue in a state of perfect inactivity? The
 “ excellence of their nature, is vainly pre-
 “ tended as a reason; why a wise man should
 “ shew them reverence; for what excellence
 “ can there be in that nature, which is entire-
 “ ly taken up in the pleasure of self-enjoy-
 “ ment, and neither does, nor has done, nor
 “ ever will do, any thing else? What piety
 “ can be due to that Being from whom you
 “ can receive nothing? or how can any re-
 “ gard at all be due to that which has no me-
 “ rit in it? Piety (or Religion) is looked
 “ upon as justice towards God; but what
 “ right can there be whereon to found justice,
 “ if there be no manner of common tie or re-
 “ lation

^b Quid est enim cur Deos. ab hominibus colendos dicas? cum Dii non modò homines non colant, sed omnino nihil curent, nihil agant. At est eorum eximia quædam præstansq; natura; ut ea debeat ipsa per se ad colendum elicere sapientem. An quicquam eximium potest esse in eâ naturâ quæ suâ voluptate lætans, nihil nec actura sit unquam, neq; agat, neq; egerit? Quæ porrò pietas ei debetur, à quo nihil acceperis? Aut quid omnino, cujus nullum meritum sit, ei deberi potest? Est enim pietas justitia adversum Deos; cum quibus quid potest nobis esse juris, cum homini nulla cum Deo communitas? *De Nat. Deor. l. 1. cap. 41.*

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“lation between God and Man?” ^c And he farther argues, that *Epicurus*, by removing from his notion of a Deity, all Favour and good-will to mankind, as things arising from weakness and imperfection, had plainly rooted out the very foundation of Religion, by destroying that, which is the peculiar character of the best and most excellent nature, *viz.* Goodness and Beneficence. And he judges with good reason, that *Posidonius* was not mistaken in his opinion of *Epicurus*, when he thought him to be at the bottom a Real Atheist; though in words he outwardly owned the being of a God, to avoid the publick odium: for otherwise he could not think him so weak, as really to believe things so absur’d and inconsistent of the Divine nature. And therefore he concludes after this manner, ^d *If there could be any such God,*

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(as

^c Epicurus verò ex animis hominum extraxit radicibus religionem, cum Diis immortalibus & gratiam & opem sustulit. Cum enim optimam & præstantissimam naturam Dei dicat esse, negat idem esse in Deo gratiam, tollit id quod maximè proprium est optimæ præstantissimæq; naturæ. Quid enim melius, aut quid præstantius bonitate & beneficentiâ? *ib. cap. 43.*

^d Si maximè talis est Deus, ut nullâ gratiâ, nullâ hominum caritate teneatur, valeat. Quid enim dicam, propitius sit? Esse enim propitius potest nemini: quoniam, ut dicitis, omnis in imbecillate est & gratia & caritas. *ib. 44. in fine.*

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(as *Epicurus* imagined) *without kindness or good will towards men, I would take my final farewell of him: For why should I beg his grace or favour? for he cannot be kind or gracious to any, since, in the opinion of you Epicureans, all kindness and good-will is founded in weakness, and want of self-sufficiency.*

This then ought to be look'd upon as agreeable to the common reason of mankind, that a persuasion or belief, not only of the Being of a God, but also of his universal providence and concern for mankind; and consequently an expectation, that he will some way or other reward men for their obedience to his will, is a necessary foundation of Religion. This is the summ of what is intended in the words of the Text, *without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* And upon this Faith the Apostle grounds all the worthy actions of those excellent persons, who lived in the first ages of the world; and whose virtues were so eminent, as to be remember'd with honour to future generations.

But because there are some who think Religion

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ligion and Morality to be things so distinct in nature, that they may be separated in fact; and therefore though they allow that no man can be a Religious man, without believing some religious principle (besides the meer not denying the Existence of a God) yet as to all human duties, arising from them as men, wherein they think the sum of all morality consists, they would persuade us, that they may be well enough preserved and secured without any such belief; and consequently that no Moral principle can oblige a man to the belief of a God and Providence. It may be matter of speculation or curiosity, in which a thinking man may employ himself if he pleases; as he may in the consideration of the motion or quiescence of the earth, or some *phænomena* in the heavenly bodies yet more remote from him. But as to the virtue or necessity of believing any invisible principle, they pretend to see none. I design therefore in my discourses upon this subject, to set some of the arguments for the Being of a God and Providence, &c. in such a light as may not only shew the truth and certainty of the thing, but our Natural obligation likewise to the belief of it, as we are Reasonable creatures: by which it will appear, that we cannot perform

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all those duties, which are incumbent on us as we are men, without respect had to something above or beyond our own nature, and consequently that Atheism and Infidelity are inconsistent with any sure and lasting moral principles, which can universally affect mankind. And the method I design to take shall be this.

I. I shall endeavour to shew that, according to the general Sentiments of mankind, there cannot be any perfect morality expected where there is no belief of the first principles of Religion.

II. That therefore all Societies of men, that have ever subsisted in any order in the world, have always profess'd the belief of God's Existence, and at least of some kind of Providence, and some expectation of divine Rewards and Punishments.

III. That this belief or universal consent did not arise from any art, or contrivance, or compact of men, in order to keep one another in awe ; but was really antecedent to it, and built upon a more universal principle.

IV. This will lead me to consider upon what foundation this general belief or persuasion is built. (*Of this see Sermon VI.*)

I. I shall

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I. I shall endeavour to shew, that according to the general sentiments of mankind, there cannot be any perfect morality expected, where there is no belief of the first principles of Religion. When *Abimelech*, the king of *Gerar*, expostulated with *Abraham* for concealing from him that *Sarah* was his wife, whereby he was in danger of being brought into a snare, and doing what would by no means have been agreeable to the rules of hospitality, and asked him, *What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?* *Abraham* gives him this Reason for it: *Because I thought surely, the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake.* Being newly come a stranger into the country, and not knowing what sense of a Deity prevailed among them, he knew not what sort of treatment he might expect. For he reasoned with himself; that if there were no awe of Religion among them, there could be no sufficient restraint from doing any act of injustice or cruelty, where it would tend to a present gratification of their appetites, or passions; unless there were some superior outward force to deter them from it, which he was sensible

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sensible he wanted. And in this way of reasoning *Abraham* was by no means singular. Even *Abimelech* himself seems to have been satisfied with the conclusion, if the premisses had been true as *Abraham* suspected. For indeed the generality of mankind have ever reasoned after the same manner in this case. And therefore *Tully* when he argues, that those who deny the Providence of God and his concern for mankind, do necessarily destroy all the grounds of Religion, adds also, ^f *that if the sense of Piety and Religion be taken away, the greatest disturbance and confusion in human life would necessarily follow.* And though he is seldom given to be very positive, yet he plainly intimates his opinion, ^g *that if Piety towards God was removed, there would be an end of all Fidelity, and of the bonds of all human society, and even of Justice itself, the summ of all virtues.* And in this he speaks his own sense of the matter, and not merely that of any particular sect of Philosophers. And accordingly

^f ---- Quibus sublati, perturbatio vitæ sequitur & magna confusio.

^g ---- Atque haud scio, an pietate adversus Deos sublatâ, fides etiam & societas humani generis, & una excellentissima virtus justitia tollatur.

Lib. I. de N. Deor. in præmio.

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ly in fact it has always been found, that in those places where there has been little sense of God and Religion, or where the notions of Religion have been greatly debased and corrupted, so as to have little effect upon the minds of men in their moral conduct, there the manners of men have been always most brutish and inhuman. And on the contrary, where men have had the justest and most lively sense of a Deity and a Providence, there all moral virtues between man and man have flourished, the most worthy and generous actions have been performed, and the manners of men been ever most human and civilized. I own indeed, that men's notions of Religion it self may be so much depraved and perverted, by the craft of some, and the weakness of others, as to become the occasion of much mischief. And Superstition may so far prevail over some, as even to overwhelm the common principles of Morality in divers instances. And on the other hand there may possibly be found, now and then, a particular man of so singularly good a natural disposition, as to behave himself with decency in all the common offices of human life, without any previous reflecting upon the obligations of Religion, and whose practice is therefore

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fore better than his principles. But now, as it would, in the first case, be very unreasonable to charge those evils upon Religion, which are occasioned purely by the corruption of it, and which if it were truly and sincerely practised, it would intirely prevent: So in the second case, to form a general Argument of the uselessness or uncertainty of Religious Principles, from some single instances, which happen but very rarely, would be equally absurd and unreasonable. For what if a man now and then be found better than his principles? Is this any commendation of those principles, which, if pursued, would make him much worse than nature has made him? We are not to seek for truth in the uncertain and variable practices of men, but in plain and necessary deductions from the nature of things, and such as the generality of men using their reason, when they are under no prejudice, will naturally make. And in like manner, we can by no means conclude, that the principles of Atheism are either capable of producing, or even consistent with, a perfect Morality, only because it may happen, that a man, who by chance embraces them, may possibly be sober and temperate, and may exercise the outward acts of justice or beneficence,

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cence, gratitude or friendship in some particular instances.

The question then is not, Whether a particular thoughtful man may not see the natural fitness and propriety of a great many moral actions, and accordingly practise them, abstractedly from all other considerations, and without reflecting upon any future consequences, as the reward or punishment of them; nor Whether some men may not hold inconsistent principles, which, if duly attended to, in their consequences would naturally destroy one another : But the question is, Whether, if the minds of men were not generally influenced by the apprehension of something distinct from this principle of meer fitness and congruity of actions to the nature of things; that is, of some Being upon whom the existence of things themselves, and consequently their natures and the congruity of one to another, depends, not by chance but wise design, it could ever be possible for the generality of mankind to have any such firm notions of moral good and evil, as to keep awake what we call natural Conscience in them, and fill them with hopes or fears according to the tenor of their actions. My meaning is, that, without the belief of a Supreme

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preme Intelligent Being, upon whom the nature of things depends, and who has a power of exacting from all free Agents a conformity of their actions to that law of nature which he has establish'd, and who will some way or other take cognizance of them; such a law, supposed to arise merely from the fitness of things, would have but very little influence: it would be as ineffectual to the greatest part of mankind, as a human law without any Sanction annexed, or the apprehension of any Magistrate to put it in execution. It is possible that some men may have that benevolence to society, and that generous sense of publick good, as to be a law unto themselves, and of their own accord may do what the best human law would direct them to. But what is this to the bulk of mankind? And even this cannot be expected where the notions of a Deity are excluded. We are to take human nature as it generally is, and to consider what sort of belief or persuasion has the greatest and most universal influence over it. And if we do this, we shall find, that Infidelity in the first principles of Religion is utterly inconsistent with a perfect Morality, and that upon these two accounts.

I. Because

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1. Because, if there be no belief of a God and a Providence, nor any expectation of future rewards and punishments from any invisible Being, there cannot, in the common sense of mankind, be any sufficient bond of morality between man and man.

2. Because if there be really a God that has any concern with us, or for us, a complete morality must necessarily have respect to him, as well as to our intercourse with one another.

1. Because if there be no belief of a God and a Providence, nor any expectation of future rewards and punishments from any invisible Being, there cannot, in the common sense of mankind, be any sufficient bond of morality between man and man.

If indeed the actions of men were directed only by sense or instinct, as the actions of brutes are, and had no dependence upon any invisible principle in the mind, morality would then be nothing else but living according to that natural instinct, nor would any kind of faith or belief be necessary to such actions. But this is not the morality of men endued with understanding and freedom of will; nor is it what gives them such a conscience of their own actions, as to raise any satisfaction
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or displeasure with themselves for what they have done, after the actions are over. For that is a thing of a much higher nature, which requires reason, and reflection, and some application of mind, both to things past and future, as well as present; and consequently must suppose a belief of something invisible, upon which we are moved to action in a human or reasonable way, and a comparing of our actions, with some antecedent rule or law, for the transgression of which we inwardly judge our selves accountable to some superior Being, who is some way or other as conscious of what we do, as we our selves are. And to this purpose let it be observed;

I. That all human actions, which are not merely animal, depend upon a belief or persuasion of something future or invisible, which gives the first motion to them: that is, men never designedly undertake any thing considerable, but they expect either to acquire something good and useful from it, or to avoid something evil which would otherwise ensue. Thus men plant and sow upon a belief of future fruit; they work, and trade to remote countries which they have never seen, not only upon a belief, that there are are such countries, but also that they shall receive some advantage

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tage by their pains and hazard : All which things are future, and none of them capable of a strict demonstration. And though this consideration may seem not to have any great relation to the belief of a Providence; yet, if we take the matter right, we cannot but observe, that even these probabilities of the future consequences of human actions, by which men are excited to perform this or that, have more or less weight with them, as men are more or less persuaded of an overruling power that keeps the world in a constant order. For the more Chance rules, the less can any prospect of the future be depended on; and the more uncertain the prospect, the less is the inducement to act upon it. But;

2. Moral actions do depend still more upon the acknowledgment of principles, remote from sense, and superior to chance: and our obligation in conscience to the steady performance of such actions, must be founded upon the belief of an intelligent Legislator, who is also an inspector of our behaviour. For let virtue be defined after what manner you please, let it be *the love of order*, Harmony or Proportion of mind; let it be a Living agreeably to the perfection of nature, or acting for the

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good of the whole Human species, of which we are but a part : Call it by what fine names soever, (which perhaps are less intelligible than the thing it self without such defining) yet still the question returns, who constituted this order of things ? who first made this harmony or proportion ? or who is the author of this nature ? ^h For he must be the ultimate Legislator ; and this Law of nature, this rule of morality, must be his Will, though not arbitrary and mutable, but directed by his supreme reason ; whether it be made known to us by the observation of that natural order of things which he has established, and from whence, by reasoning, we gather the fitness and decency of every moral action ; or whether it be discovered to us by any more immediate direction or revelation from himself. And if there be not an opinion or persuasion, that this Supreme Being is a witness of human life, and

g Hanc igitur video sapientissimorum fuisse sententiam, legem neq; hominum ingeniis excogitatam, neq; scitum aliquod esse populorum, sed æternum quiddam quod universum mundum regeret, imperandi prohibendiq; sapientia. Ita principem legem illam & ultimam, mentem esse dicebant omnia ratione aut cogentis aut vetantis Dei. *Cic. de legib. lib. 2. And again,*

Lex vera atq; princeps apta ad jubendum & ad vetandum, ratio est recta summi Jovis. *ib.*

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and conscious of what we do, even in our most secret recesses, it is hard to conceive how our own consciences should be affected with shame and regret, though men applaud us, when we do ill; or with pleasure and satisfaction, though we incur the censure of a mistaken world, when we do well. These effects of conscience, suppose in us a belief of the intimate and constant presence of one, whose favour or displeasure is more to be regarded than any outward consideration whatever. From whence it will follow, that whatever opinion sets men loose from the restraint of their own consciences, will make their justice, fidelity, gratitude, and all other moral virtues, respecting their fellow creatures, very precarious; and therefore an avowed infidelity in the first principles of Religion, must needs be very destructive of that morality, which regards our intercourse with one another.

An Author not suspected of partiality in the case, has freely owned this truth, when he tells us, that ^h “ where the Theistical belief is entire and perfect, there must be a “ steady opinion of the superintendency of a “ Supreme Being, a witness and spectator of
G 2 “ human

^h *Enquiry concerning Virtue, pag 57.*

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“ human life, and conscious of all that is felt
 “ or acted in the universe; so that in the per-
 “ fectest recess, or deepest solitude, there
 “ must be *one* still presum’d remaining with
 “ us, whose presence singly must be of more
 “ moment than that of the most august assem-
 “ bly on earth. In such a presence as this,
 “ ’tis impossible, but as the shame of guilty
 “ actions must be the greatest of any, so must
 “ the honour be of well doing, even un-
 “ der the unjust censure of a world. And in this
 “ case, ’tis very apparent how far conducting
 “ a perfect Theism must be to virtue, and how
 “ great deficiency there is in Atheism.”

And that this is agreeable to the natural
 and common sentiments of mankind, is plain
 from hence, that in all ages and nations of
 the world, an Oath, or appeal to the Deity has
 been look’d upon as the strongest security, both
 of veracity in asserting, and fidelity in promi-
 sing, that one man could freely give another.
 Now this custom of demanding or offering an
 oath could never have obtain’d, without an
 antecedent opinion deeply rooted in the minds
 of men, That the belief of a Deity, and
 the sense of his being a witness and Judge of
 our actions, was one of the strongest engage-
 ments to act justly and honestly by one ano-
 ther.

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ther. Nay, farther, The very abuse of this principle by wicked men, and the making hypocritical pretences to Religion, or offering an oath for confirmation, in order to deceive others the more securely, is an evident proof of mens natural opinion, that the strongest obligation to human virtue, or moral honesty, is founded in a sincere belief of the first principles of Religion. And that this opinion is not adventitious or contrived by cunning men, and so instilled into others, to keep them in awe; I shall have a proper occasion to observe more at large hereafter.

'Tis a fatal thing, both to Religion and Morality, to distinguish so far between them as to imagine, that either of them can be perfect without the other. For as we have all the reason in the world to suspect the sincerity of that man's professions of Religion, who is willingly deficient in moral honesty; so he that openly declares himself to be under no restraint of conscience from the belief of any invisible principle, must excuse us, if we doubt whether his integrity may in all cases be safely depended on. He that believes the principles of Religion, has all the other engagements to virtue that an Infidel can pretend to, and also that which is looked upon as more

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binding than all the rest over and above : and what reason then can I have to be secure of his virtue or morality, who owns himself to be under fewer obligations to practise it than other men ? Upon these considerations therefore, if Morality were limited to our behaviour towards men only, even that could not be sufficiently secured upon the principles of Atheism. But those principles will be farther deficient likewise upon another account ; and that is,

2. Because if there really be a God that has any concern with us, or for us, a compleat morality must necessarily have respect to him, as well as to our intercourse with one another. This is what cannot reasonably be denied, unless there should be any who think, because God is a Spirit, and invisible, that therefore men, who are clothed with body, have no means of shewing him any honour or reverence, or of acting or doing any thing that can have relation to such a super-eminent Being. But if there be any such persons, they have a very mean opinion of a human mind, and a very odd notion of the morality of human actions, which depends upon the internal dispositions of the mind, of which outward actions are only an external sign, and that not
always

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always certain or infallible. But if we are capable of knowing or believing any thing of God, as a supreme mind governing the world, we are also capable of inwardly owning this, and consequently of giving him an inward adoration and worship in our own minds. We may exercise affections of Faith, or trust, and assistance in him; of Love, and reverence, and obedience towards him. These are natural inward acts of Piety and Religion, due to an infinitely powerful, wise and beneficent Being, who has given us understanding, and will, and powers of acting: in which communicable Attributes, an human mind is related to the divine Being. If therefore, morality cannot be compleat and perfect, without acting suitably and becomingly, to every relation in which we stand to any Beings, and especially rational Beings, that are known to us; the very chief part of it must be in proper acts of Piety and Religion to the first Being, from whom we derive our reason it self. Upon this account *Tully*, in stating the law of nature, which is the rule of moral actions, and from whence all other laws ought to be deduced, ⁱ justly lays

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ⁱ Est igitur, quoniam nihil est ratione melius, eaq; & in homine & in Deo, prima homini cum Deo rationis societas, &c.
De legg. l. 1. Jam

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the foundation of it, in that original relation or society which is between God and man.

^k And he makes the acknowledgment of a God, and a Providence over human affairs, and the different regards which that providence has to the good or evil actions of men, to be the first principles, which every member of society ought to be fully persuaded of; as may be seen at large, in his books *de Legibus*.

And in this he agrees not only with *Plato*, and with other wise men that had gone before him, in writing upon this subject, but with the common sentiments of mankind, expressed in the general practice of all civilized nations. I need not be particular in insisting upon this, which may in some measure appear from what has already been suggested, in this discourse; and

Jam verò virtus eadem in homine ac Deo est, neq; ullo alio ingenio præterea. Est autem virtus nihil aliud quàm in se perfecta & ad summum perducta natura. Est igitur homini cum Deo similitudo. Quod cùm ita sit, quæ tandem potest esse propior certiorve cognatio? *ibid.*

^k Sit igitur hoc jam à principio persuasum civibus dominos esse omnium rerum ac moderatores Deos, eaq; quæ gerantur eorum geri judicio ac numine, eosdemq; optimè de genere hominum mereri, & qualis quisq; sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, quàm mente, quàm pietate religiones colat, intueri, piorumq; & impiorum habere rationem: his enim rebus imbutæ mentes, haud sanè abhorrebunt ab utili, & à verâ sententiâ. *De Legg. lib. 2.*

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and which will farther appear, from the consideration of what I shall offer under the next head ; wherein I am to shew,

II. That all Societies of men, that have ever subsisted in any tolerable order in the world, have professed the belief of God's existence, and at least of some kind of Providence, and an expectation of divine rewards and punishments.

Of which I design to speak, with God's assistance, the next opportunity.



SERMON



S E R M O N IV.

Preached *April* the 4th 1717.

Heb. xi. 6.

But without Faith it is impossible to please God ; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.



THE summ of what is primarily intended in these words, as I observed in my last Discourse, is this, That a persuation, or belief, not only of the Being of a God, but also of his uni-

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universal Providence and Concern for mankind, and consequently, an expectation that he will some way or other reward men for their obedience to his Will, is a necessary foundation of Religion. And upon this faith, or belief, the Apostle grounds all the great and worthy actions of those excellent persons mentioned in this Chapter, who lived in the first ages of the world, divers of them before any general written Revelation of the will of God to mankind, whose piety and virtue were remembered with honour to future generations, and thought fit to be recorded, as examples to others, in those writings which God designed as a lasting instruction to all those unto whom he vouchsafed to reveal his will in that manner. Now though it will hardly be denied, that these first principles of Religion are absolutely necessary to all voluntary acts of religious Worship, strictly so called; that is, to invocation and adoration of the Deity, and to all hope and expectation of any benefit from such Worship of him; yet, because there are some who think, or pretend at least, that Religion and Morality are things so distinct in themselves, that they may be separated from each other in practice, and that humane virtue may subsist apart and entire without piety
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towards God, therefore in speaking to this subject, I propos'd to shew, that we cannot perform all those duties which are incumbent on us, as we are men, without respect had to something above or beyond our own nature; that is, some superior Being, establishing such an order and connection of things, from whence the Law of nature, which obliges mankind to such and such actions, does result: and consequently that Atheism, or Infidelity of the first principles of Religion, is inconsistent with any sure and lasting moral principles, that can universally affect or oblige mankind. And in order to this I design'd to pursue this method.

I. To shew, that according to the general sentiments of mankind, there cannot be any perfect Morality expected, where there is no belief of the first principles of Religion.

II. That therefore all societies of men, that have ever subsisted in the world, in any tolerable order, have always profess'd the belief of God's Existence, and at least of some kind of Providence, and an expectation of divine Rewards and Punishments.

III. That this belief, or universal consent, did not arise from any Art, or contrivance, or compact

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compact of men, in order to keep one another in awe, but was really antecedent to it, and built upon a more universal principle.

The first of these I have already spoken to, and shewn the general sense of mankind about it, in my last Discourse; which will farther appear by considering what I am now to speak to, *viz.*

II. That all societies of men, which have ever subsisted in the world, in any tolerable order, have always profess'd a belief of God's Existence, and at least of some kind of Providence, and an expectation of divine Rewards and Punishments.

I express this matter in these general terms at present, because I would avoid any needless cavils, that might be raised against some parts of that evidence which I shall bring for the proof of it, if I were to express it in terms implying an absolute and particular Providence, or such perfect Rewards and Punishments in another life as is generally understood among Christians. For it is sufficient to my present purpose, to shew a general agreement of mankind, in the belief of that which is the foundation of Religion; though both their notions, as to the nature of God and
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the extent of his Providence, and their practices as to religious Worship, and their opinions about a future State were exceeding different, and when compared, even inconsistent with one another. And I mention Societies of men subsisting in some tolerable order, because it cannot be denied, that there have, in divers ages and divers countries, been particular men that have profess'd their disbelief of God's Existence, others that have been doubtful about it, besides those that have been suspected; though they have never been so many as to form any regular society, nor had they any common principles, upon which they could well unite into society. This being premised, I shall now proceed to shew,

The universality of this persuasion, or belief of the Being of God and some sort of Future state. And I join these two together, not that we are to look for the same explicit acknowledgment of the latter as of the former every where, there being not the same occasion always to make it appear in the outward practice of Religion, or the open profession of it, and it requires somewhat a longer deduction of reasoning to prove it; but because the two have a near affinity to one another, and may, I hope, be both proved to have an
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original foundation in nature, and to be parts of the natural Creed of mankind. Now to shew this universality, I shall

1. Produce the testimony of some authors of the best credit ; and then,

2. Shew how agreeable this is to what we find to have been practised in all considerable nations of which we have any history.

1. Produce the testimony of some authors of the best credit, and such who have not rashly and by chance, but upon the most mature consideration, asserted it. And I shall begin with *Tully* ; because he, having written several Treatises upon the subject, had occasion to enquire very carefully into the matter. And we find by his Books, that he had very diligently examined all the opinions, that were of any note, of those that went before him, both as to the nature of God, and the nature of the human Soul. And though he is not usually very positive in delivering his own opinion (as professing himself of the *Academic* Sect) yet in the points now before us, he has done it very clearly. As to the common consent of mankind, he has asserted it in many places ; both where he speaks his own sense in
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his own person, and where he introduces different Sects of Philosophers speaking their sense: So that we may conclude it to have been a point generally allowed in all former times down to his own age. Where he speaks in his own person, he tells us, ^a *That of so many kinds of animals as there are in the world, there is none except man that has any knowledge of God; but of mankind there is no nation, either so barbarous or savage, but that they know they ought to have some God, though they know not what kind of God is most proper to be owned.* Again, ^b *This is look'd upon, says he, as a very strong argument for our belief of the Existence of Gods, that there is no nation so wild, no man of so strange a make, as not to have his mind tinctured with some belief of the Gods.* Many
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^a Itaque ex tot generibus nullum est animal præter hominem quod habeat notitiam aliquam Dei: de ipsisque hominibus nulla gens est, neque tam immansueta, neque tam fera, quæ non, etiamsi ignoret qualem habere Deum deceat, tamen habendum sciatur. *De Leg. l. i. 18.*

^b Ut porro firmissimum hoc afferri videtur cur Deos esse credamus, quòd nulla gens tam fera, nemo omnium tam sit immanis, cujus mentem non imbuerit Deorum opinio: multi de Diis prava sentiunt: id enim vitioso more effici solet: Omnes tamen esse vim & naturam Divinam arbitrantur. *Tusc. Disp. l. i. cap. 13.*

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have perverse and odd opinions of them, for this is wont to happen from vitious custom, but yet all do think that there is some Divine Power and Nature. And it is to be observed, that he is in that discourse treating of the future Existence of the soul of man, which he puts likewise upon the same foot of general Belief, and therefore calls natural. ° I can, says he, bring very good authorities for this opinion (of a future State) and such as ought in all cases, and are generally wont to weigh very much: and the first is, the sense of all Antiquity; which, the nearer it was to the beginning of things and to the first Divine Offspring, might probably have the better means of seeing what was true. One thing then which was perfectly inbred in these ancient people, was, that there was some sense after death, and that man was not utterly extinguished by departing out of this life.

And

° Auctoribus quidem ad istam sententiam (quam vis obtineri) uti optimis possumus: quod in omnibus causis & debet & solet valere plurimum: & primum quidem omni antiquitate: quæ, quo propius aberat ab ortu & divinâ progenie hoc melius ea fortasse quæ erant vera cernebat: itaque unum illud erat insitum priscis illis, quos castos appellat Ennius, esse in morte sensum, neque excessu vitæ sic deleri hominem ut funditus interiret, &c. *Tusc. disp. l. 1. c. 12.*

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And again, in the same Book he tells us, ^d *As we do by nature believe there are Gods, but by Reason know what kind of beings they are ; so we are persuaded, that souls continue after death, from the general consent of all nations: but what place they abide in, and what their nature is, we must learn from Reason.*

I am not yet strictly considering what was Tully's own Opinion, either of the Nature of the Soul or the Being of God ; but from what I have cited out of him, I think it evidently appears, that he was fully persuaded, that both the Being of God and a future State were generally believed in the most antient times and among all sorts of people.

In his Books *De Naturâ Deorum*, the same thing is asserted by the several Sects of Philosophers, in whose name he speaks. Under the person of *Balbus* the *Stoic*, it is made a strong argument for the certainty of a Divine Being, ^e *Because if men had not a clear and*

H 2

evi-

^d Sed ut Deos esse naturâ opinamur, qualesque sint ratione cognoscimus; sic permanere animos arbitramur consensu nationum omnium: quâ in sedē maneant qualesque sint, ratione discendum est. *ib. cap. 16.*

^e -----Quod nisi cognitum comprehensumque animis haberemus, non tam stabilis opinio permaneret, nec confirmaretur

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evident perception of the truth of it in their Minds, the belief of it would not have continued so constant, nor have been confirmed by length of time, and gained such ground throughout all ages and generations of men. And he again concludes, ^f That this is the constant opinion of all men in all nations: for the sense of God's Existence, is as it were innate or ingraven upon the minds of all men.

As for the *Epicureans*, it is plain, it would have been most consistent with their *hypothesis* of no Providence or future state, if they could also have had any colour for entirely denying the being of any God; and yet it seems they were sensible, that the belief of it was so universal, that they would not offer to contradict it, but roundly fall in with it, and ^g magnify *Epicurus* for being the first that
from

retur diuturnitate temporis, nec unà cum seculis ætatibusque hominum inveterare potuisset. *De Nat. Deor. l. II. 7.*

^f Itaque inter omnes omnium gentium sententia constat. Omnibus enim innatum est & in animo quasi insculptum, esse Deos. *ib.*

^g Ea qui consideret, quàm inconsultè ac temere dicantur venerari *Epicurum*, & in eorum ipsorum numero de quibus hæc quæstio est habere debeat; solus enim vidit primum esse Deos quod in omnium animis eorum notionem impressisset ipsa natura: quæ est enim gens, aut quod genus hominum;
quod

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from thence took the hint to make a natural impression or *idea* the foundation of it: for so *Tully*, under the person of *Velleius*, represents their opinion; *For what nation is there, or what race of men that have not, without any teaching, some anticipation of Gods in their mind? which Epicurus calls πρόληψις, that is, an antecedent information of the thing in the mind, without which nothing can be understood, or enquired, or discoursed upon.----* For since this opinion is not founded upon any institution, or custom, or law, and yet every single man firmly agrees in it, it must necessarily be understood, that there are Gods, because we have an implanted, or rather innate knowledge of them: Now what the nature of all men agrees in must be true, therefore we must own, that there are Gods. This is his way of arguing.

H 3

Now

quod non habeat sine doctrinâ anticipationem quandam Deorum? Quam appellat πρόληψιν *Epicurus*, id est, anteceptam animo rei quandam informationem, sine quâ nec intelligi quicquam, nec quæri, nec disputari possit.—— Cum enim non instituto aliquo, aut more, aut lege sit opinio constituta, maneatque ad unum omnium firma consensus; intelligi necesse est esse Deos, quoniam insitas eorum vel potius innatas cognitiones habemus. De quo autem omnium natura consentit id verum esse necesse est. Esse igitur Deos confitendum est. *De N. D. lib. 1.*

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Now what does *Cotta* the *Academic*, who was to say the most he could against every man's opinion, reply to all this? Why truly, as much as the case will bear, and as much, in effect, as has been said upon the subject ever since. For first, he allows the Being of God, but is not satisfied with the *Epicurean* manner of proving it; then he thinks the argument itself of universality, in the manner that *Velleius* proposed it, is not true. For he supposes, ^h that *there may be divers nations* (but he offers to name none of them) *so very brutish and void of all humanity, as not to have any notion or suspicion of the Being of a God*. Then he mentions particular persons, as exceptions to this general opinion, such as *Diagoras*, commonly called the *Atheist*, and *Theodorus*, and the famous Sophist *Protagoras*, who was banished out of the territories of *Athens* and had his books burnt, for writing in the beginning of one of them, That he was not able to say, whether there were any Gods or no. And from this usage he supposes, ⁱ that *others of the same sentiments might*

^h — Equidem arbitror multas esse gentes, sic immanitate efferatas, ut apud eas nulla suspicio Deorum sit.

ⁱ Ex quo equidem existimo tardiores ad hanc sententiam profitendam multos esse factos, quippe cum poenam ne dubitatio quidem effugere potuisset.

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might be made more shy of declaring their opinions openly, since they saw that only the doubting of it could not escape unpunished.

And farther he imagines, that all sacrilegious, impious and perjur'd persons do really not believe any God at all.

This is the summ of what he alledges against the universality of the belief of God's Existence : and though it may have some force in it against the notion of the *Epicureans*, who laid the whole proof, for the Being of God upon that natural anticipation or innate *idea* of him, which they supposed every single man had, and not upon any consideration of the visible effects of Providence, or any original tradition from the first parents of mankind ; yet as to what concerns the common notion of universal consent, as it was maintained by others, it is no argument against it. For what if now and then a man, affecting singularity and despising all common opinions, shall argue against the Existence of God ? Or, what if some clanns of monstrously brutish people, that are sunk below the rest of the human species, and have very little, besides an human shape, even in other respects, which can evidence their having common human Reason, should not discover any sign of Re-

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ligion among them? Is this a sufficient exception to the generality of mankind using their reason alike in other matters? Do we not allow, that mankind generally take themselves to be creatures naturally made for society, though there be some that avoid all human conversation in fact, or some that out of an itch of maintaining something contrary to the rest of the world, will needs affirm, that the natural state of man is a state of *war*? And therefore *Cotta*, as much an *Academic* as he pretended to be, does in effect give up this point, and tells us, ^k *That as far as the other sects of Philosophers agreed in it, he would not meddle with the argument, since almost every one, and himself in particular, owned the Being of Gods.*

I have been the more particular in taking notice of the accounts which we have in the writings of *Tully* as to this matter, for a reason which I shall have occasion to mention by and by. And I shall therefore be more brief as to the rest who lived before him, who all speak of these opinions, as what had generally

^k Quæ communia sunt vobis cum cæteris philosophis non attingam, ut hoc ipsum: placet enim omnibus fere, mihi quæque imprimis, Deos esse.

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rally prevailed before their own age, time out of mind. And some give their reasons, how it came to be so, which they would never have done, if they had not verily thought the thing true in fact. ¹*Plato*, for instance, makes the general consent of all men, *Greeks* and *Barbarians*, in the belief of a God, one argument for the certainty of the thing. And both for this, and for the Soul's Immortality and Future Rewards and Punishments, which are things he often treats of, he frequently hints at the general opinion of former ages. And that *Socrates*, his great master, did use to argue from the same topic, appears not only from *Plato's* doctrine, which was principally derived from him, but also from that discourse which *Xenophon* tells us, he himself heard from *Socrates's* his own mouth, in a conversation with one *Aristodemus*, a pretender to Infidelity at that time; in which, among other excellent arguments for a God and a Providence taking particular care of mankind, he has this remarkable passage, ^m *Do you think,*
says

¹ De legg. l. 10. p. 886.

^m Οἷεν δ' ἂν τὰς Θεὰς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις δοῦναι ἐμρῶσαι, ὥς ἱκανοὶ ἔσιν εἶ καὶ κακῶς ποιεῖν, εἰ μὴ θωατοὶ ἦσαν· καὶ ἀνθρώπου ἐξαπατάμενος τὸν πάντα χρόνον εὐδέπορ' ἂν αἰσθέσθαι; ἔχ' ὁρᾷς ὅτι
τὰ

says he, *the Gods would have made this opinion, That they are able to reward and punish, so natural to mankind, if they were not able to it? Or that all men could have been deceived for all ages, and never yet have perceived it? Do you not observe, that the most ancient cities and nations among mankind have ever been most religious, and the most prudent ages shewn the greatest regard to the Gods? Aristotle, who is by some thought not to have been over-favourable to Religion, tells us, " That all men have an opinion of the Gods, and all men assign the highest place to the Divine Nature, both Barbarians and Greeks, whoever believe the Being of Gods. And the author of the book De Mundo, (who is by some thought not to be Aristotle, yet certainly an author of great antiquity, even of the age of Aristotle himself, if his dedicating his Book to Alexander can be any Proof of it,) affirms,*
That

τὰ πολυχρονιώτατα καὶ σοφώτατα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, πόλεις καὶ ἔθνη
 Θεοτεβέστατά ἐσι, καὶ αἱ φρονιμώταται ἡλικίαι Θεῶν ἐπιμελίσσονται;
 Xenoph. ἀπομν. lib. I. cap. 4.

ⁿ Πάντες γὰρ ἄνθρωποι ὡς Θεῶν ἔχουσιν ὑπόληψιν, καὶ πάντες
 τὸ ἀνωτάτω τῷ Θεῷ τόπον ἀποδίδουσι καὶ βάρβαροι καὶ Ἕλληνες,
 ὅσοι περ εἶναι νομίζουσι Θεούς. De Caelo. l. I. cap. 3.

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That ° there is a very antient way of reasoning, or discourse, and such as all men receive from their forefathers, That all things are from God, and consist or are constituted by God, and that no nature is of itself sufficient if destitute of his preservation. It would be endless, and is by no means necessary, to produce all the testimonies that might be had to this purpose out of Greek and Latin writers, who all follow one another, especially those that lived in the times after those which I have already mentioned. I shall only mention that remarkable one of Maximus Tyrius, in his discourse of, What the nature of God is according to Plato. About the nature of God, he tells us, men were infinitely divided, and every man speaks according to his own apprehensions, ^P But, says he, in so great strife, confusion and disagreement of opinions, you may

° Αρχαῖοι μὲν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ καὶ πατέριος ἐστὶ πάντων ἀνθρώποις ὡς ἐκ Θεῶν τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ Θεῶν ἡμῖν σωθήσκειν· ἕδεμία δὲ φύσις αὐτὴ καθ' ἑαυτῇ αὐτάρχης ἐξημαρθεῖσα τῆς ἐκ τῆς σωτηρίας. cap. 6.

P Ἐν τοσούτῳ ᾧ πολέμῳ καὶ σάτει καὶ ἀφρωνίᾳ ἕνα ἴδοις ἂν, ἐν πάσῃ γῇ ὁμόφωνοι νόμον καὶ λόγον, ὅτι Θεὸς εἷς πάντων βασιλεὺς, καὶ πατὴρ, καὶ Θεοὶ πολλοὶ Θεῶν παῖδες σωάρχοντες Θεῶν. ταῦτα καὶ ἡ ἑλλὰς λέγει, καὶ ὁ ἑσπερίων λέγει, καὶ ὁ ἡπειρώτης καὶ ὁ θαλάττης, καὶ ὁ σοφὸς, καὶ ὁ ἄσοφος.

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may observe one law, or discourse, wherein all agree all the world over, viz. That there is one God, the King and Father of all, and many Gods, the offspring of this God and partakers of his government. This the Greek says, and this the Barbarian says, be that dwells upon the continent, and he that lives by the sea, both the wise and the unwise. Thus much therefore for testimony.

2. Let it be considered, how agreeable this is to what we find to have been practised in all considerable Nations, of which we have any good history ; for the general practice of a nation, for a long time together, is the surest indication of what is the prevailing opinion upon which such practice is founded. Now I believe we may challenge all the histories in the world, of any credit, to name any civilized people, where there was not always some form or other of Religious worship, some publick place or other, either Temple, or Grove, or Mountain, or Altar, used and appointed for the performance of it. As to the particular kinds of Idolatry which prevailed in several nations, there may perhaps be some account given how, and by whom, they were first introduced. But there is no ground in the world to assert, that because there was a time when

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when such a particular corruption of Religion first came in among a people, therefore there was also a time, when such a people had no Religion at all among them. A man may as well assert, that, because there was a time when men had not found out the way of sowing corn, or cultivating vines, for making of bread and wine, or because there may be yet some uncultivated corners of the world, where it is not yet done, therefore there was also a time when all men generally did, and a place where some men now, do live without eating or drinking. ^a *Orpheus* is supposed by some to have first brought Religion into *Greece* out of *Egypt*, whither he went to learn it. But had they then no Religion at all in *Greece* before his time? Yes, certainly; though they had not that particular kind of Idolatry, or those rites and ceremonies which he brought among them. What new model he brought, or the time when, is very uncertain; but what ^r *Plato* thinks is very probable, that the first inhabitants of *Greece* did worship the Sun, Moon, Earth, Stars and Heaven, as visible Deities, as many of the Barbarous nations still did in his time, and they called them *θεοὶ* from

θεῖν

^a *Diodorus Sic. lib. 1.*

^r *In Cratylō, p. 397.*

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Θεῶν, because of their swift motion: and though this be somewhat different, yet, if we make allowance for time, it is not inconsistent with what ¹ *Herodotus* tell us, That the ancient *Pelasgi*, who were the first inhabitants of *Greece* before the *Hellens* came among them, sacrificed all kinds of things, and made prayers to the Gods; but that they had no particular names or surnames for their Gods, only they called them in general Θεοὶ, from τίθημι or Θείναι, because they put and kept every thing, and every countrey, in order: But that long after this, they learn'd out of *Egypt* the names of other Gods. As to the general belief of a future state, that prevailing custom of deifying excellent men after their death, which obtained very early, and was very far spread in the world, is a convincing proof of it, and is accordingly made use of by ¹ *Tully*, and other good Authors, for that purpose. There are indeed those, who call the Immortality

¹ Ἔθνον δὲ καὶ πάντα πρόσθερον οἱ Πελασγοὶ θεοῖσι ἐπευχόμενοι, ὡς ἐγὼ ἐν Δαδώνῃ οἶδα ἀκέσας ἐπανυμῖν δὲ καὶ ἄνομα ἐποιεῖν ἐδενὶ κούτων· καὶ γὰρ ἀκηκόεσάν κω. Θεὸς δὲ προσονόμασαν σφείας ἀπὸ τῶ τοιούτου ὅτι κόσμῳ δέντες τὰ πάντα πράγματα καὶ πάσας νομὰς εἶχον· ἔπειτα δὲ χρόνῳ πολλῷ διελθόντες ἐπύθοιντο ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἀπηγμένα τὰ ἰνόματα τῶν θεῶν ἄλλων. *Herod. lib. 2. cap. 52.* ¹ *Cic. Tusc. Disp. 1.*

SERMON IV. III

ality of the Soul an Invention of the *Egyptians*, and make *Herodotus* their voucher for it; and from thence would infer, that other nations knew nothing of it, till travellers brought it from thence.

Now if, indeed, the *Egyptians* had been so much older than all the rest of mankind as they pretended to be, then this opinion might well have been first among them, because we suppose it to have been as old as mankind; but otherwise they had it not before others, nor were the Inventers of it: nor do the words of *Herodotus* imply so much; for what he says is this, *⁂ The Egyptians are the first that say the soul of man is immortal, but that after the body is destroyed, it passes into another animal; and that when it has gone through all land and sea-animals, and fowls of the air, then it enters into the body of a man again, and this round of migration is performed in three thousand years; and there*

⁂ Πρῶτοι ἢ τὸν θεὸν ἢ λόγον Αἰγύπτιοι εἰσι εἰπόντες ὡς ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ ἀθάνατος ἐστὶ, ἢ σῶμα ἢ καθαρθένον, εἰς ἄλλο σῶμα αἰεὶ γινόμενον ἐσδύεσθαι. ἐπεὶ ἢ περιέλθῃ πάντας τὰ χερσαῖα καὶ τὰ θαλάσσια καὶ τὰ πτηνὰ, αὐτὶς εἰς ἀνθρώπου σῶμα γινόμενον ἐσδύνει. ἢ περιέλθῃ ἢ αὐτῇ γίνεσθαι ἐν τριχίλοισι ἔτεσι. τῷ τῷ λόγῳ εἰσὶ οἱ ἑλλήνων ἐχρήσαντο, οἱ μὲν πρότερον οἱ ἢ ὕστερον ὡς ἰδὼν ἐαυτῶν εἶοι. ἢ ἐγὼ εἰδὼς τὰ ἐνόμαζεν ἐ γράφω. *Interp. cap. 131.*

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there have been some Greeks, both formerly and of later years, who have pretended to this opinion, whose names I know but will not set down.

Now let the *Egyptians* have the credit of this invention of Transmigration, if they please, and let *Pythagoras* bring his doctrine of it from thence into *Greece*, yet the belief of a future state was both in *Greece* and other countries, long before his time; for not only *Pherecydes* professed this opinion, whose scholar *Pythagoras* was before he went into *Egypt*; but *Homer*, who lived some ages before him, supposes it to have been a well known opinion in all countries, or else he could not have grafted so many beautiful fictions upon it as he has done. *Herodotus* also tells us, that the *Getæ*, the valiantest and honestest among the *Thracians*, believed the Soul's immortality, and said, when they died they went to the God, or Δαίμων. *Zamolxis*^w, (who is in some Copies called Ζάλμοξις, and whom some of the *Getæ* called Γεβελείζιν;) whom some *Greeks*, out of vanity for their own nation, would make to have been servant to *Pythagoras*, and from him to have carried this opinion

^w *Melpom. cap. 94, & 95.*

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nion among these *Thracians*: But this, *Herodotus* tells us, he did not believe, because he thought this *Zamolxis*, whoever he was, man or dæmon, lived long before the time of *Pythagoras*.

The *Greeks* were very vain, as well as the *Egyptians*, and so would fain pretend to the honour of discovering every thing that once came into credit: but we can by no means allow it in these original Opinions; though they may have had the first open professors of Atheism among them, as the *Egyptians* have had the invention of the grossest sorts of superstition. For according to *Ælian*,
** the wisdom of the barbarous nations, i. e. those that were not Greeks, is highly to be commended upon this account, that none of them ever fell to Atheism, or called the Being of God, or a Providence, that takes care of us, in question.*

Well, but some will needs have it, that the belief of a Providence and a Future State, belonged only to the ignorant vulgar, and that no philosophers or wise men believed them.

I

And

* Καὶ τίς οὐκ ἂν ἐπῆνεσε τὴν τῶν βαρβάρων σοφίαν; εἶγε μηδεὶς αὐτῶν εἰς ἀθεότητά ἐξέπεσε, μηδὲ ἀμφιδόκῃσι θεῶν, ἀρχαί γε εἰσιν ἢ ἅκ εἰσι, καὶ ἀρχαί γε ἡμῶν φροντίζουσιν ἢ ὅ. ὅς. *Ælian*, *varia Histor.* lib. 2. cap. 31.

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And the Author of the *Discourse of Free-thinking* asserts, that *Solomon* himself denied the Immortality of the Soul, and argued for the Eternity of the World, and against a Future State, in the book of *Ecclesiastes*: and he pretends to vindicate his *want of knowledge*, as he calls it, in this important point, by observing, y “ That the Immortality of the
 “ Soul was no where plain in the *Old Testa-*
 “ *ment*, was denied by the *Sadducees*, the
 “ most philosophical part of the *Jewish* nati-
 “ on, and of whom their magistrates princi-
 “ pally consisted; was thought doubtful by
 “ most Sects of the *Grecian* philosophers,
 “ and denied by the *Stoicks*, the most religi-
 “ ous Sect of them all; had never, accord-
 “ ing to *Cicero*, been asserted in writing by
 “ any *Greek* Author extant in his time, be-
 “ fore *Pherecydes* of the island *Syrus*; and
 “ was first taught by the *Egyptians*, or ac-
 “ cording to our learned Sir *John Marsham*,
 “ was the most *noble invention*. No won-
 “ der therefore (says he) if *Solomon* reason
 “ like the learned men of his own countrey,
 “ and the more learned philosophers of the
 “ neighbouring nations.” As to the *Old Te-*
stament,

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stament, I think it may be proved beyond exception, that the Patriarchs believed a Future State, and acted upon that belief; so that the thing is rather taken as an allowed principle of natural Religion, than offered to be formally proved by the first revelation; which is a plainer evidence of its being anciently believed, than any explicit declaration of the truth of it would be. As for the *Egyptian* Invention I have mentioned it already; and as to the *Sadducees*, they were very far from being the most philosophical part of the *Jewish* nation, as he would have them; for *Josephus*, who knew them well, represents them quite otherwise: but let them be as philosophical a Sect as they will, there were none of them in *Solomon's* time, for him to reason like; though their might be sensual people, as there are in all ages, that have but little regard for another life, (such as they afterwards were,) against whose practices *Solomon* often argues. Nor have we any account extant, of any learned Philosophers in the neighbouring nations, except what are mention'd, in Holy writ, as far inferior to *Solomon* in wisdom. Men of learning were very few, among the *Greeks* especially, at that time; and if there were any, we have none of their writings to

I 2

know

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know what their opinion was, or how they argued against another life. For *Solomon* is at least as old as *Homer*, who is the first heathen Author, whose genuine works are come down to us; and he was certainly acquainted with the doctrine of a Future State, and took it to be generally believed, though he do not speak of it in a philosophical manner, or argue for it from the nature of the Soul, as *Thales* afterwards did². But the truth is, the great design of *Solomon* in that book, out of which this Author pretends to make him argue against a Future State, is to establish the certainty of a Future Judgment, which he not only mentions in several parts of it, to keep up the sense of it in mens minds as they go along in it, but has made this the *conclusion of the whole matter*: *"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man: For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* Now can any man of a common capacity; who reads this, believe that *Solomon* denied a Future State? And if this Author could, either ignorantly or wilfully, give so gross a misrepresentation, of

² Vide *Plutarch. de Placit. Philos. lib. 4. cap. 2.*

³ *Chap. 12. v. 13, 14.*

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what every *English* reader may so easily discover him in, we ought not to be surprized, if he have strangely perverted the sense of other writers, which do not lie so much in the way of every common reader.

As to the opinion of Philosophers, which he would persuade us to have been generally against a Future State, *Tully* has, in divers places of his writings, told us, that the ancientest of them, and all the wisest and best, did hold the Immortality of the Soul; and that the contrary was but a novel opinion among them. *I cannot, says he, by any means come into their opinion, who have of late times begun to reason, that the soul dies with the body, and that there is an end of all at death; the authority of the ancients is of much more value with me.* And by ancients he means those that had philosophized upon the subject, as appears by the opposition to those, who lately begun to philosophize otherwise; and by his adding over and above, as distinct arguments to persuade him to the same thing, the practice of the old *Romans*, the

I 3

doctrine

^b Neque enim assentior iis qui hæc nuper disserere cœperunt, cum corporibus simul animos interire, atque omnia morte deleri. Plus apud me antiquorum auctoritas valet. *Cic. in Læliæ.*

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doctrine and fame of the *Pythagoreans*, who lived in part of *Italy*, and the constant opinion of *Socrates*, who was, in the judgment of *Apollo*, the wisest of men, ^c and *who did not say sometimes one thing and sometimes another in this point, as in many others, but always asserted the same, that the souls of men were Divine, and returned to heaven when they departed out of the body.* This indeed he says in the person of *Lælius*; but in the beginning of the book, or dedication of it to *Atticus*, he allows all that is said to be his own sense of the matter; as he does likewise what he delivers in the book *de Senectute*, under the person of *Cato Major*; and in that he tells us, *he was brought to this belief, not only from reason and disputation, but from the same also and authority of the greatest philosophers.* And towards the end of that book, he calls those that reasoned otherwise, meaning the followers of *Epicurus*, in way of contempt, ^c *petty Philosophers.* And

^c — Qui non tum hoc, tum illud ut in plerisque, sed idem dicebat semper, animos hominum esse divinos, iisque, cum è corpore excessissent, reditum in cælum patere. *ib.*

^d Nec me solum ratio ac disputatio impulit ut ita crederem, sed nobilitas etiam summorum philosophorum & auctoritas. *Cato Maj. cap. 21.*

^e — Quidam minuti philosophi. *cap. ult.*

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And the very same sentiments are expressed in all his writings, where he delivers his opinion in his own person, and treats upon this subject very largely, and from the same topicks as he makes his *Cato Major* and *Lælius* do. It is obvious to any one, that reads his writings; what an high esteem he every where expresses for the judgment of *Socrates*, in moral and religious matters, and how high a value he every where sets upon the writings of *Plato*, more than upon other authors; and since their opinion is so well known, it would be a strong presumption what were the sentiments of *Tully* also, if we had nothing else to judge by; especially, considering what a mean opinion he every where expresses, of the understanding of *Epicurus* in matters of Philosophy, both Natural and Moral; and how little of common learning he supposes him to have had. But he has not left us to guess at his opinion from such inferences, but has given us, as I have observed, plain declarations of it.

The reason why I take the more notice of this, as well as of what I observed out of him before, is, because the fore-mentioned author (*p.* 136.) has very unfairly represented the sense of this excellent writer; insinuating as if he had denied the Immortality of the Soul,

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even in that very book of *Tusculan Questions*, one great part of which is designedly written to prove it, and the proof of which he immediately goes upon, after those words which this author has so manifestly perverted, and upon which he has taken occasion unjustly to charge others, for imposing upon the world, in delivering the sense of *Tully*. Which charge might fairly be retorted upon himself in divers instances, [and particularly in that character which he makes *Tully* give of *Epicurus*, p. 130.] if there were now any occasion to do it. I must confess, when I see almost all the writers which this author has cited (which are not a few for so small a compass) so grievously perverted, which could not happen either by chance or mere ignorance, I cannot but have a very suspicious opinion of that morality, which these espousers of the cause of Infidelity pretend to, since they have so little regard to Truth or common sincerity in defending it.

But to return ; if the general current of the ancient Philosophers had not greatly favoured the doctrine of a Future State, as it would be very unlikely, that so judicious a writer as *Tully*, should condemn the contrary for a novel and unphilosophical doctrine, so it would
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have been the foolishest thing in the world, for the followers of *Epicurus* to have magnified their master so much, for being the inventor of a New doctrine, which, as they supposed, would effectually free men from all fear or suspicion of what was to come hereafter, because he asserted, and pretended to have found out, upon philosophical principles, the Mortality of the Soul as well as the body. It would have been much more to their purpose, to have shewn that the ancient philosophers were of the same opinion, if they had really been so, because the concurrence of more wise men in so important a point, would have added more weight to it; even though they had allowed *Epicurus* the honour of reducing these scattered principles into a new System.

But perhaps the followers of *Epicurus* were not much more acquainted with the opinions of the more ancient philosophers, than their master was, who pretended that he was self-taught, and had been beholding to no body for his learning; which, as *Tully* observes, might very easily be believed from the meanness of it. (*De Nat. D. lib. 1.*)

However, though we may allow them to have been no great searchers into Antiquity, yet it seems not likely, that they should all
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so generally applaud him for the Founder of this doctrine, if there had not been some colour for it. If there had either been any formed sect of philosophers, or any considerable number of men famous for their learning, who had expressly denied all future existence of the Soul, it is hardly possible that all his followers, and especially such as *Lucretius*, could have been so ignorant as not to have heard of it.

It cannot indeed be denied, that the ancient philosophers had very different opinions one from another, about the nature and seat of the Soul, and likewise about the extent of its duration. For according to *Tully*, *They that hold the separation of the soul and body at death, do some of them think the soul to be immediately dissipated, some hold it to continue for a long time, others for ever, i. e. they did not all hold it to be eternal, or absolutely immortal, who yet held its future existence in a separate state after the body.* Neither need it be denied, that some of their opinions were such, as being strictly pursued through all their consequences, would be found very different from, and even, inconsistent

^f Qui discedere animum censent, alii statim dissipari, alii diu manere, alii semper. *Tuscul. lib. 1. cap. 9.*

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consistent with that immortality, which the clear revelation of the Gospel has made more fully known to us. For as the primitive doctrine or tradition concerning either the Nature of God, or the Soul of Man, grew daily more and more corrupted, through a general vicious practice, so those growing corruptions did very much obscure the reasonings, even of those of the best understanding, and render them liable to much uncertainty, when they came to particular explications, of what they were in the general persuaded of from tradition. They did not sufficiently distinguish between the nature of body and spirit, when they first begun to philosophize about them. And from hence we find that some, who for certain held the Soul's Immortality, yet are said to have thought it only a finer sort of matter: And the opinions of others concerning the seat or chief residence of the soul in the body, have been sometimes mistaken for their opinion of its nature or substance, particularly *Empedocles*, is by *Tully* said to have thought the soul to be *cordi suffusum sanguinem*; yet, from what *Plutarch* says, it is evident, he meant this only for the seat of the soul,

8 Tusc. Quest. lib. 1. cap. 9. Plut. de Placitis Philos. lib. 4. cap. 5.

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soul, and not the soul it self. However, if we consult the remains of what is come down to us, of the most eminent philosophers among the ancients, we may see that a Providence and a Future State, was what the wisest and most virtuous of them always held, and without which they could not tell how to solve the appearances, either of the natural or moral world.

I shall not now produce any particular passages out of the ancient writers to this purpose, because I shall have occasion to alledge some of them hereafter, when I come to shew, that this Belief, or universal Consent, concerning some sort of Divine Providence, and some kind of Future State, did not arise at first from any Art, or contrivance, or compact of men, in order to keep one another in awe; but was really antecedent to it, and built upon a more universal Principle: of which, with God's assistance, I design to speak the next opportunity.



SERMON



S E R M O N V.

Preached *May* the 6th 1717.



Heb. xi. 6.

But without Faith it is impossible to please God: For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.



Have already, from these words, taken occasion to shew, in my two last Discourses,

I. That, according to the general sentiments of mankind, there cannot be any perfect

fect morality expected, where there is no belief of the first principles of Religion.

II. That therefore all societies of men, that have ever subsisted in the world in any tolerable order, have always profest the belief of God's Existence, and at least of some kind of providence over men, and an expectation of some Divine Rewards and Punishments.

I shall now proceed to consider the third thing, *viz.*

III. That this belief or universal consent did not arise from any Art, or contrivance, or compact of men, in order to keep one another in awe, but was really antecedent to it, and built upon a more universal principle. My meaning is, that the first principles of Religion were not an human invention, but were known and acknowledged by mankind, before designing men pretended to make any secular or political use of them. The shewing of this will be an answer to that objection, with which some men think they can do great execution against all Religion, when they call it *Priestcraft* and contrivance of artificial men, who have deceived all the rest of the world, except themselves, and some few others of great
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caution and deep penetration, who scorn to be imposed upon, and are therefore resolved to assert their own freedom, in believing nothing. Now though in this and the last age there have been divers persons, who have mightily pleased themselves in dressing up their own *Scepticism*, or inclination to Infidelity after this manner, yet the objection itself is by no means new. Nor indeed can it be expected, that any new discovery should be made of any real objection, which can affect the first principles of Religion, after they have stood the tryal of so many thousand years, notwithstanding the great inclination which some persons, in almost every age, have shewn to discard them. New turns of wit against some particular modes of Religion may be offered, and old objections may be new modelled, so as to startle, or unsettle for a time, the minds of weak and unexperienced men, who have not heard of them before; yet when they come to be strip'd of their new dress, they appear to be at the bottom nothing but what has been said many times before, and found upon examination very insufficient. And thus as to this objection now before us, it is well known, that, in several ages of the world,

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men that have bore ill-will to Religion, as being very uneasy under the restraints of it, and have therefore been desirous of promoting and encouraging Atheistical principles, have offered such suggestions as this against the truth of all Religion, *viz.* That the first notions of it were introduced into the world by crafty men, who imposed them upon the ignorance and credulity of rude and barbarous people, in order to keep them under government, by the fear of invisible beings; and contrived an order of men, whom they let into the secret, whose interest it should be to support and encourage such a belief, and that by this means it has been propagated from one generation to another. The most plausible pretence for this suggestion, is taken from hence, that a great many things, which, upon due examination, appear to have been cheat and imposture, have yet for a long time been current in the world, as part of Religion, and pass'd as such without contradiction: and from hence they venture to insinuate, that the very foundation of Religion itself is of the same kind, *i. e.* a mere humane contrivance. And they know very well, that if any considerable number of men could be brought heartily to

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entertain such a suspicion, ^a it would greatly weaken the credit of all Religion; and bring an odium upon all who profess it, as being either imposed upon themselves, or in a confederacy to impose upon others.

Now though I am fully persuaded; that not half of those who make this insinuation, do really believe it to be true, because we find; that in other parts of their arguing, they are often forced to admit some things that are utterly inconsistent with such a belief; yet because such insinuations, though they be known to be mere calumny, by those that use them, may do much mischief, by filling the minds of weak and unwary people with doubts and scruples; therefore it is fit that the matter should be set in a clear light, and the weakness of such suggestions shewn anew, though it have often been done before; since the suggestions themselves are frequently renewed, with an intent at least to disparage Religion and weaken men's concern for it.

The method which I now intend to take,

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^a Quid? ii qui dixerunt totam de Diis immortalibus opinionem fictam esse ab hominibus sapientibus reip. causa, ut quos ratio non posset, eos ad officium Religio duceret, nonne omnem religionem funditus sustulerunt? *Cotta apud Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. 1. cæp. 42.*

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in shewing the weakness and folly of this pretence against the truth of the principles of Religion, shall be this,

I. To consider it in the way of Fact, whereby it will appear to be without any ground or foundation in point of History.

II. In the way of Reason and argument, to shew the absurdity of such a supposition.

I. To consider it in the way of Fact, whereby it will appear, to be without any ground or foundation in point of history. They that pretend to give an account, how the generality of mankind came to be possess'd with so remarkable an opinion, as that of the Being of a God all at once, if it had no antecedent foundation in nature, nor were ever known among them before, should, one would think, in reason be concerned, to assign some time and place for so extraordinary an event, to give it at least some colour of probability. For if there ever was a time, when all mankind was entirely without any notion of a God, or Providence, and had always before continued so, but yet all at once, either by consent or compulsion, were brought to agree in the belief of his Being, so great a revolution

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tion could not easily have been forgotten, but that some footsteps of it must remain, and some memorial of it be preserved in some part of the world by some means or other. It is indeed supposed to have been brought about before there was any learning or history, when people were all very rude and ignorant, and easy to be imposed upon by their governors; but then those governors must at the same time be supposed to have been men of very extraordinary parts and great subtilty indeed, who could with so great dexterity bring such a wonderful change to pass, without being taken notice of; there must have been such a prodigious disproportion between the capacities of the governors and their people, as has never been known in any age or country since. But not to insist too rigorously upon such scruples, which yet must require a great degree of credulity to get over; let us consider, what pretence they have from antiquity for supposing such a fact; and though they cannot assign the exact time, when such a general belief first began, yet at least they ought to pitch upon some time antecedent to it, when there was no such belief, or else they ought not to blame us for thinking it to be as old as mankind.

It would indeed be unreasonable to expect,
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that

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that they should bring us any authentick written History, of a time which may be supposed to have been so long before writing was invented; but at least there should be some traditional relations of it preserved in some parts of the world, like the story of *Deucalion's* Deluge, which tradition should in time come to be taken notice of in history, as soon as history begins to appear. But now they can alledge nothing like this in the first beginnings of history, but the further we go backwards into antiquity, the stronger the tradition runs against this suggestion. We may indeed trace up some particular kinds of Idolatry to their first original, and we may also come up to a time when Idols began to be worship'd instead of God; but to a time when men owned or believed no God at all we cannot come. We may go back, for instance, to the Deification of *Hercules* or *Bacchus*, or the rest of those imaginary Deities, who were once mortal men, and whose worship therefore had a beginning from men; but the higher we go beyond this, the nearer we shall come to the original notion of the true God, the maker of heaven and earth.

And to this purpose, it is a very remarkable observation which *Aristotle* makes concerning
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ing this very kind of antient tradition,^b *That there are these Gods, says he, and that the Deity contains (or encompasses) all nature, are notions that have been delivered down by primitive and antient men, and left to posterity wrap'd up in the dress of Fable; but that other things have been fabulously added, to persuade the multitude, and for the benefit of Law and publick utility. For thus they say, for instance, that these Gods are of human shape, and are like some other animals, and divers other things consequent upon these opinions, or agreeable to them; from which if a man should separate, and take only that which was first or original, namely, That they thought Gods were the first be-*

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ings,

^b Παροδέδογ' ὅτι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ παλαιῶν ἐν μύθεο χήματι καταλειμμένα τοῖς ὕστερον, ὅτι Θεοὶ τέ εἰσιν ἔτι, καὶ περιέχεται τὸ Θεὸν τῶν ὅλων φύσιν, τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ μυθικῶς ἤδη προσέχθη πρὸς τὴν περὶ τῶν πολλῶν καὶ πρὸς τὴν εἰς τὰς νόμους καὶ τὸ συμφέρον χρῆσιν. ἀνθρωποειδῆς τε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων ὁμοίως τιτὶ λέγεται, καὶ τέτοις ἑτέροις ἀκόλουθα καὶ ἀπλήσια τοῖς εἰρημνίοις ὧν ἕτις χωρίσας αὐτὸ λάβοι μόνον τὸ πρῶτον, ὅτι Θεὸς ὦντο τὰς πρώτας ἐσίας εἶναι, θείως ἀν' εἰρημνίας νομίσαι, καὶ κατὰ τὸ εἶκος πολλὰς ἐρημνίας εἰς τὸ δυνάμεν ἐκείνης καὶ τέχνης καὶ φιλοσοφίας, καὶ πάλιν φθινορηνῶν, καὶ ταύτας τὰς δόξας ἐκείνων, οἷον λείψανα περισεσῶσθαι μέχρι τῆς νῦν. ἢ μὲν ἐν πάτεραις δόξαι, καὶ ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων ἐπὶ τοσούτων ἡμῖν φανερὰ μόνον. *Arist. Metaphys. lib. Δ κεφ. γ. in fine.*

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ings, he might well think it divinely spoken, and that perhaps every art or science, being often found out as far as possible, and lost again, these their opinions have been preserved, as reliques to this time. The opinion then of our forefathers, and that which comes from the first men, is only so far evident to us. This passage deserves to be the more taken notice of, because *Aristotle* had as great an insight into the nature of human policy, as most men, and is as little suspected of credulity, in matters of Religion; and in this place he makes as much allowance for human invention, as the case will bear; and yet he plainly makes a great difference between the truth of things delivered, and that fabulous dress, in which it was conveyed down to posterity; and likewise puts a manifest distinction, between the true original tradition, or belief of a Deity, and those other conceits, which were superadded to it by human invention, for some publick convenience, or better governing the people, which might be altered and changed, in different ages and places, while the fundamental tradition continued the same. He had before, in this Treatise, with a great deal of metaphysical reasoning, asserted

ed a first, Eternal, active principle, as the Efficient cause of all things; ^c condemning those philosophers as very weak reasoners, who offered to philosophize about the nature of things, without taking in this first principle; and commending ^c *Anaxagoras*, for making *mind* or understanding the cause of the world, and of all order in it: though he blames him for some other parts of his Philosophy, ^d and particularly for introducing this *mind*, only out of necessity for making the world, and when he was at a pinch, for want of other causes; since he was, in other matters, so willing to alledge any other cause rather than *mind*. From hence it seems, in *Aristotle's* opinion, that *Anaxagoras* ought to have attributed more to this same *νῆς*, or *mind*, in other parts of his philosophy, than he was wont to do. *Aristotle* himself, by considering the nature of *mind*, ^e and of a first mo-

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ver,

^c Νῆν δέ τις εἰπὼν εἶναι, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς ζώοις καὶ ἐν τῇ φύσιν
τῷ αἵτιον καὶ τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ τῇ τάξεως πάντης, οἷον ἔφην ἐφάνη παρ'
εἰκῇ λέγοντας τὸς πρῶτον. Φανερώς μὲν ἐν Ἀναξαγόρῳ ἴσμεν
ἀψάμμεν τέτων τῶ λόγον. *Metaph. l. I. cap. 3.*

^d Ἀναξαγόρας τε γὰρ μηχανῇ χρῆσθαι τὴν νῆν παρὰ τὴν κοτμοποιίαν.
καὶ ὅταν ἀπορήσῃ διὰ τίν' αἰτίαν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐστὶ, τότε ἔλκεν αὐτόν.
Ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις πάντεσσι μάλλον αἰτιᾶσθαι τὴν γινομένην ἢ νῆν. *ib.*
cap. 4.

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ver, and cause of motion, concludes, that
*God is the most excellent, eternal Being;
 so that life, and continual eternal existence
 belongs to God; for this is the notion of God.*
 And it is to this one first Mover, who is him-
 self immoveable, and indivisible, and un-
 changeable, the first being and cause of all
 things, that he applies the meaning of the
 true original tradition before-mentioned, when
 stripped of all human addition, and fable or
 allegory. For certain therefore, he did not
 believe that the acknowledgment of the Being
 of one supreme God, was any human or po-
 litical invention. What opinion *Plato* before
 him had of this matter, is evident from the
 whole tenour of his writings; the great de-
 sign of which, is to establish the first princi-
 ples of Religion and Morality, the Being and
 Providence of God, the natural and eternal
 distinction of Good and Evil, the Immortali-
 ty of the Soul, and a State of future Rewards
 and Punishments; and he observes how much
 happier the first ages of the world were, and
 how much more innocent and virtuous, when
 the firm belief of these principles of Religion
 did

^c ---Φαμέν ὅ τ' Θεὸν εἶναι ζῶν ἀίδιον ἄετον. ὡς ζῶν καὶ αἰὼν
 συνεχὴς καὶ ἀίδιος ὑπάρχει τῷ Θεῷ· τὸτο γὰρ ὁ Θεός. *Metaph.*
 12. 7.

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did more universally prevail among them. And upon this ^f he instances in the time of *Rhadamanthus*, the most ancient legislator among the *Cretans*, according to old tradition, who had a ready and expeditious way of administering justice, and determining all controversies, by the interposition of an oath, or appeal to God; for he knew that the men of that time were all effectually convinced of the Being of a God, and the wisdom and justice of his nature. But (says he) in these later times, when men are degenerated, and their principles so corrupted, that some disbelieve the very Being of God, others imagine there is no Providence at all over human affairs, and a much greater number, are persuaded, that the Gods may be appeased with some little outward services, or sacrifices, and be flattered, so as not to punish them, though they commit the greatest acts of fraud or villany; other kind of laws, and other forms of judicature, are now become necessary to restrain those, whom conscience, and the sense of a Deity, do not persuade; which in those primitive times of Religion, and simplicity of manners, were the great guard of virtue in the age of *Rhadamanthus*.
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^f Vid. Plat. de Legg. lib. 12. p. 948.

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Such reflections as these, shew how far this philosopher was from thinking, that in fact there had ever been formerly a time, when men were without all sense of Religion; and, on the contrary, how much stronger and clearer, he thought the sense of Religion to have been in former ages, as they approached nearer to the beginning of the world. For he supposes, that the first men came from God, and knew their own original, and therefore he tells us, in respect to this primitive tradition, *That we ought to give credit to those who were, as they said, the first offspring of the Gods, since they surely knew their own progenitors. It is therefore impossible to disbelieve the children of the Gods, though they do not speak in the way of strict and absolute demonstration; but according to general law or custom, we ought to believe them, as professing to declare only things which peculiarly belonged to themselves, and with which they were particularly acquainted.* It may indeed be objected to this passage, that *Plato* applies it to those which were vulgarly reputed Gods in his own time, according to the fabulous Heathen genealogies of them,

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for which he allows, that no certain argument, or necessary demonstration, could be given, besides this tradition; and that therefore he uses this only in compliance with law and custom, and to screen himself from harm, while he did not, in his heart, believe those vulgarly reputed Gods to be really such. Now admitting that he applies this argument of tradition to a wrong object in this instance, and seemingly defends the reigning superstition and polytheism of his own time by it: yet from the use which he makes of it, to lead men to the first Creator of all things, whom he immediately after brings in, giving instruction to these created Deities, how they should proceed, according to the powers he had given them, in producing other inferior rational Beings; It is evident, that he thought the Original belief of mankind, came gradually, by some means or other, from the Father and maker of all things. For it is to be observed, that he makes two sorts of created Gods; one in compliance with the then prevailing Theology, which took the Heaven and the Earth, the Sun and Stars, for visible Gods, as supposing them to be animated; the other sort, was of those *δαίμονες* which were not visible, but could, when they pleased, make themselves known

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known to us; of whom, he says, ^h That to give an account of their generation was above human skill, but we ought to believe the most ancient tradition, which came from themselves, as it follows in the passage which I mentioned before: and a little after, he calls the former sort, those which ⁱ *apparently move about*; or, according to Tully's translation, * *qui moventur palamque se ostendunt*; and the other, *those which shew themselves only in such a measure as they please*, i. e. *qui eatenus nobis declarantur quoad ipsi volunt*. Now if we do but allow, that by these *created Gods*, who were *invisible*, but had a *power of manifesting themselves, in such measure as they pleased*, Plato meant such kind of Beings as we call *Angels*, we may then see a farther glimpse of original Truth shining through this dark tradition, and conveying down to us, not only the notion of one supreme God, but of these his first ministers, which are, even in Scripture language, called the *Sons of God*.

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^h ---Τὰ δὲ Θεῶν ὁρατῶν καὶ κινήτων εἰρημῶρα φύσεως ἐχέτω τέλος. Περὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων δαιμόνων εἰπεῖν καὶ γινῶναι τῶν ἡμέσων μείζον ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς· πεισεῖον δὲ τοῖς εἰρηκόσιν, &c.

ⁱ ---Ὅσοι τε περιπολῶσι φανεῶς, καὶ ὅσοι φαίνοντ' καθόσον αὐτοῖς θέλωσι, θεοί.--

* *In his book de Universo.*

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It is to be observed, that the first men of Letters, of whom we have any account in *Heathen* Antiquity, were such as they called *Theologers*, that is, Poets or others, who treated of matters relating to the Gods and their worship, and who sometimes gave an account of the original of things in a religious way, upon the ground, as it should seem, of ancient traditionary doctrine; which being by degrees corrupted according to the Poets fancy, and many Fables introduced into it; some by way of allegory disguising the truth, and others, in compliance with growing Superstition, adding human passions and vices to the notion of the Gods they worship'd; it came to pass in time, that these Fables, being set off in a pleasing manner by the Poets, became the occasion of such infinite error in the superstructure, that the foundation of truth was overwhelmed and almost quite lost by it. Some men therefore being weary of this way, struck into another method, and begun to offer at giving an account of the original of things in a *Physiological* way. But here they were greatly confounded: for the wisest of them plainly saw, ^k that there was no proceeding in this

^k See *Aristotelis Metaphys.* l. 1. cap. 3.

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this way, without admitting an Intelligent principle and first cause of all things. Though some, that were conceited of their own parts, fancied they could solve every thing by matter and motion, even without a first mover, yet in this they got but little credit among considering men. The vanity and uncertainty of physiological speculations, and the great difficulty of coming to any certain and useful conclusion that way, made *Socrates* turn his thoughts to moral and practical Philosophy, as the proper business of men: and this he saw could not subsist without a firm belief of the Being and Providence of a God and of a Future State, and without these principles he knew there was no proceeding to any satisfaction, either in the Theological or Physiological way. Upon his foundation *Plato*, who was his Scholar, built all his Philosophy, but yet taking in all the light that former wise men could afford him: and so he was curious to search into all the traditions of former times, and to consider what reliques of antient truth were hid under the disguise of poetical Theology, as well as the opinions of those who sought to find it in the way of Reason and Philosophy. And he could not in either of these ways find any ground for
Atheism

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Atheism, or suspicion that the principles of Religion were a cheat.

Though *Plato* be one of the oldest of those Philosophers, whose writings are come down to us in any great degree entire, yet we do not want several instances of the sentiments of such Philosophers as lived before him; who, though they had no great opinion of the prevailing Superstitions of their own times, which were establish'd both by Law and Custom, yet made both the Being of God and the future State of the Soul, not only an Article of their Creed, but a principle of their Philosophy.

Anaxagoras, whom I mentioned before, got the surname of νῆς, *Mind* or *Intellect*, not only from his great skill and understanding in natural Philosophy, but from his constant asserting, that *not Chance or Necessity, but an eternal Mind produced and ordered all things*, as ¹ *Plutarch* and others inform us.

Thales before him is reckoned one of the first, who attained to any great skill in natural Philosophy or Physiology, and is by ^m *Aristotle* called, *The Prince or Founder of this sort*

¹ *Plutarch. in vita Periclis.*

^m Θαλῆς μὲν ὁ τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρχηγὸς φιλοσοφίας.

Aristot. Metaph. lib. I. cap. 3.

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sort of Philosophy. And he is generally reckoned the first in order of the *Ionic* Class. And it is well known, that as he supposed ⁿ *Water to have been the first matter out of which all other things were made*, so he affirmed, that *God was that eternal Mind which formed all things out of it*; And that *God knew not only the actions, but the thoughts and intentions of all men**. And it is related as one of his remarkable Apophthegms, ° *That God is the most antient of all Beings, because without any beginning, and the world the most beautiful, as being the workmanship of God.* And his opinion of the Immortality of the Soul was so much taken notice of, that he is by some said to have been the first that taught it, as *Diogenes Laërtius* informs us; which is not so to be understood, as if he had been thought the first that believed a Future State, for the contrary to that appears from all the Poets who lived before him; but only that he was one of the first among the *Greeks* that maintained its Immortality upon
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ⁿ *Thales enim Milesius* qui primus de talibus rebus quæsit, Aquam dixit esse initium rerum: Deum autem, eam mentem quæ ex aquâ cuncta fingeret. *Cic. de N. D. lib. 1. c. 10.*

* *Vide, Diog. Laert. in vita Thaletis.*

° *Προεβύτατον τῶ ὄντων Θεός, ἀχρόνητον γάρ: κάλλιστον κόσμον ποίησα γὰρ Θεός.* *Laertius in vitâ.*

philosophical principles. And the like may be said for *Pherecydes*, who lived much about the same age; for he is also by some said to have been ^P *the first, of whom we have any written account, that said the Souls of men were eternal.* And in this sense *Tully* takes it, for he says, *there were as he believes many others of the same opinion before Pherecydes:* But their written Memoirs in the philosophical way, it seems, went no higher than his age. And this is agreeable to the opinion of *Tully*; concerning the belief of those who lived long before the beginning of the philosophical age, in this very case; ^q *They,* says he; *who had not yet learn'd any thing of natural Philosophy, which begun not to be cultivated till many years after, had a full persuasion of so much as they learn'd from the admonitions of nature, though they knew not the reasons and causes of things.* I need not mention the opinion of *Pythagoras*; who is said to have been his scholar;

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^P Itaque credo etiam alios tot seculis, sed quod literis exstet, *Pherecydes Syrius* primus dixit, Animos hominum esse sempiternos. *Tusc. Quæst. l. 1. cap. 16.*

^q Qui nondum ea, quæ multis post annis tractari cœpissent; physica didicissent, tantum sibi persuaserant quantum naturâ admonente cognoverant: rationes & causas rerum non tenebant. *Cic. Tusc. Qu. lib. 1. cap. 13.*

and who was the head of the *Italic* Order of Philosophers, for his doctrine is sufficiently known. Now it appears, from the beginning of these two orders or successions of Philosophy, from *Thales* and *Pythagoras*, that how much soever the first Philosophers among the *Greeks* might be weary of those poetical fictions, which had been brought into the Religion of their forefathers, yet they had no suspicion, that the principles upon which Religion itself was founded had been an human invention: and much less can they be suspected of coming in for any share of such invention, since most of them were so far from being partial towards such principles any farther than the evident force of truth persuaded them, that some pretenders to Philosophy immediately after *Thales*, as *Anaximander*, *Democritus*, *Leucippus*, were the first that attempted to sow the seeds of Atheism in their Physiology, which yet did not grow up to any formed principle till some time after, nor were they ever able to produce such a tolerable system, as to give men of sense any satisfaction, without admitting an Intelligent principle, which they would fain have avoided.

As for those surmises which are raised from
passages

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passages pick'd up out of *Diodorus Siculus*, *Lucian*, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, or other later Authors, about the original of Religion in *Egypt*, as if the first principles of it had been invented there, what I have said in my former Discourse, is sufficient to shew the unreasonableness of them. And indeed such surmises would never have been thought of; if there had been any probability of finding another time when Religion did first begin, besides the first beginning of mankind. But the *Egyptians* pretending to such an incredible antiquity of Government above other nations, might safely claim the invention of every thing: and admitting their Chronology, no body could disprove them. And they were ready enough to impose their own fables upon the rest of the world that would believe them.

Herodotus (*Euterpe. cap. 142.*) acquaints us, that they pretended to shew him a succession of Kings of human race for above ten thousand years together, down from the time of *Orus* (who was the last of the Gods that personally reigned among them) to *Sethos* the Priest of *Vulcan*, in whose reign the army of the *Assyrians* under *Sennacharib* was wonderfully destroyed; and they told him, that in

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that long tract of time the Sun had so altered his course, as to have twice risen in the West and set in the East, contrary to what it now does, and yet that *Egypt* had continued all the while the same. And now are not such prodigious Antiquaries very fit to give an account of the original of Religion; who before this long race of men had a succession of Gods reigning among them for I do not know how many ages together? However if any are willing to allow Religion to be so very old, we are well content; because then we are sure they can never prove its beginning to have been since *Egypt* was first inhabited.

Upon the whole therefore, considering that neither time nor place can be assigned to give any reasonable ground for supposing, that the first principles of Religion were any human contrivance, we might without farther argument conclude, that they were from the beginning, and that, as *Tully* says, *It was not any conference, compact, or agreement of men that made them, nor was the persuasion*
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† ——— Omnes tamen esse vim & naturam divinam arbitrantur. Nec verò id collocutio hominum aut consensus efficit: non institutis opinio est confirmata, non legibus. Omni autem in re consensus omnium gentium lex naturæ putanda est. *Cic. Tusc. lib. 1. cap. 13.*

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or belief of them, founded or established in Institution or Law, but that the consent of all nations in them is to be esteemed the Law of Nature. However, because some men, who would fain have some colour or pretence to be Infidels, are resolved to suspect every thing that relates to Religion, especially if it have the countenance of Law or Authority on its side, and would therefore insinuate, that although all monuments of those antient times, when they suppose men were without all apprehensions of Religion, be destroyed, yet considering the advantage which Politicians make of it, to keep men in awe, they may be suspected to have had a great hand in destroying them, the better to keep this secret of Government from being ever examined into, after they had once luckily hit upon it: And so Religion might be all art and contrivance at first, though no particular account can now be given of it. I shall therefore endeavour,

2. To shew very briefly the absurdity of such a supposition in the way of Reason and argument. And to this purpose let it be considered,

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I. That in order to favour such a suspicion of the original of Religion, we must likewise suppose, that this project was begun when men were all confined within a small part of the world, that is, when they were either all under one Government, or when all the governors of the world dwelt so near together, as to be in strict agreement and close correspondence with one another, so that all seeing the common advantage of it, took care to come into the design all at once, and to transmit it as a great *arcanum* to future generations. Now this supposition will go near to destroy the very end for which it is made, for it will naturally lead men to think, that mankind might spring all at first from one common Parent, and so to admit, that the Scripture-Account of the first peopling of the world may be very probable; and this will quite ruine the *hypothesis* of those, who think that the earth has been inhabited by mankind from eternity. And as for those that allow the present frame, at least, of the world to have had a beginning, they must put this great supposed change of men's opinions about it so very near that beginning, as to leave no means of discovery, whether ever there was any such change or no; unless they could prove it

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impossible, that the first men, and some few Generations that succeeded them, should have any notion of God at all ; which can never be done, except they can by some demonstrative argument, first prove the Being of God and his discovering of himself to mankind impossible. Now 'tis very absurd, to make a supposition, which can never be granted till we have first granted that which is designed to be proved by it.

2. Let it be considered, that it is a much more difficult thing to plant a new principle or persuasion in a whole people, when it has no previous foundation, but is directly contrary to all their former apprehensions, than it is to make a political use of a general persuasion that already prevails among them ; the latter may be done with ease and by insensible degrees, but the former can hardly be attempted without great opposition. And however force may over-rule men's outward profession for a time, yet it cannot so easily change their inward sentiments. For that is a thing not to be effected in one generation. And besides, to enable the most powerful Monarch to bring such a great design about, he must either have a considerable number, that do

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really already believe the truth of what he designs to establish by their assistance, and then the supposition, that all the truth of Religion depends upon such establishment, is destroyed; or else he must really have a number of people, that act against their own certain knowledge, to establish a principle of Conscience forbidding all such acting, which is still a great absurdity. And as for this Monarch or Ruler himself, he must either really have believed the principles which he designed to introduce among his people, and then we are to seek for an higher original of it; or he must not have believed it, but known it to be a cheat, and then how came he to venture upon an experiment which might in the end really turn against him, when people saw that he intended to impose upon them? Which they would do, if he did not in all things act as one that did really believe himself. Well, but to help out this difficulty and make people willing to be imposed upon, there are some (as Mr. *Hobbes* and others upon the principles of *Lucretius*) that have advanced an additional hypothesis, which is this, viz. *That there are naturally in mankind some seeds of Religion*, that is, some peculiar qualities in the very frame of their nature, which easily dispose

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dispose them to Religion; such as, an Inquisitiveness, or desire of knowing the causes of all things, joined with an Ignorance of those causes, or inability to find them out; an Anxiety, or endless fear, about things future, arising from the like ignorance of nature; and therefore a Suspecting of some power invisible, though they know not what; and a Desire, if possible, to prevent future and unforeseen evils. And from hence they suppose, that cunning men, knowing the weaknesses of human nature, and taking advantage of this general ignorance and fear, and pretending to shew them a short way of solving all their difficulties, by having recourse to an invisible and eternal cause unknown, which is able to do every thing, they might with ease cultivate these seeds of Religion into settled Principles; and the people would readily come into this delusion, for which they were already prepared by nature: and that when both authority and custom had confirmed it, and one generation had propagated it down to another, who would then dispute the truth of it? But now, how plausible soever this may seem, yet it greatly fails in the very first principle, in supposing a natural fear in all men, without any natural ground or foundation; and yet, at the same

same time, a natural desire of knowing the ground or cause of that fear. It seems allowed, that natural reason teaches men to enquire for a cause of every thing, (as supposing, that nothing is without a cause) and not to rest satisfied in such enquiry, till they come to a first cause, from whence they can go no farther: And it is granted by these men, that all men have, and always had, a fear of some invisible Being, [*Hobbes Leviath. l.i. cap. 12.*] and that they were very ready to close with the opinion of those, who first told them, that the prime object of this fear, was God, the first cause of all things: This inferrs, that the fear of a Deity is very natural; and, in some degree, coeval with the first constitution of things. For what reason then should the truth of that cause be rejected, which gives the best account of this universal effect? But why do these men insist so much upon fear? and make that the main reason of mens so easily assenting to the principles of Religion? Have not men hopes as well as fears? and why are not these taken into the account? Are not those Attributes, which are the foundation of hope, as essential to the notion of a Deity, as those which create fear? It may be they were unwilling to mention hope, because this would
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be a ballance for fear, and so would spoil this Hypothesis, of fear alone being the occasion of mens so easily entertaining the notion of a Deity : or it may be rather, that their design is only to represent those attributes of the Deity, which should make ill men as unwilling as possible to believe his Being : or that a propension to Atheism arises from such a gloomy spirit as is void of all hope from a wise and good Being. However, I cannot but observe by the way, that Atheistical men, in owning this universal fearfulness of mankind, do in effect give judgment against themselves, and discover, that they are forced to entertain some apprehension of a Deity whether they will or no. And though they will not endeavour to make themselves fit to look upon him as the object of adoration and praise, of love, and hope, and obedience, as being the author of all good to mankind ; yet they cannot help considering of him, as the object of fear and dread, as being the fountain of all power, and it may be of justice too, For that is what makes them so suspicious of evil from him. However from hence it may likewise be considered.

3. That as all wicked men, who are desirous to continue such without any controul .
from

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from their own Consciences, have a strong inclination to discard the thoughts and apprehensions of a Deity, because they have made it their interest, that there should be none; so no doubt men of this temper would always have made great opposition to the introducing of such a belief among men, as would certainly give themselves great uneasiness, if there had not been such a foundation in nature for it, as they could not wholly destroy. Nor would wicked men fly to the practice of strange and monstrous Superstitions, as a refuge against the uneasiness of their own minds, under the sense of a Deity, if the impressions of it, and the evidence for it were not too strong to be overcome. For I doubt not but many such men really wish that there were no God, and would be glad to deliver themselves from the thoughts of him if they could; But they find the sense of his Existence planted so deep in human nature, that while they retain the use of their reason, they can never entirely root it up; which shews the unreasonableness of supposing it to be of mere human planting: Since, as [†] *Plato* long ago observed, though there be divers, that in the heat of their youth, or otherwise, endeavour to persuade

[†] *Vide Platonem de Legg. lib. 10. pag. 888.*

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persuade themselves that there is no God, yet very few could ever hold out long in this persuasion.

It might also be observed, That if the principles of Religion had been first introduced into the world merely by State-policy, the Politicians and Governors of the world should be likely to have known something of it, at least so much as to have been less subject to those anxieties of Conscience, which the despising of such principles, or living in opposition to them, generally creates ; whereas we find on the contrary, that in all ages the greatest of men, who have had nothing to fear from human power, have been as much afraid, by the secret terrors of Religion, and have undergone as great agonies of mind as the meanest of mortals ; which shews their natural apprehension of a Power and Justice superior to them, even though they are unwilling to confess it.

But to conclude, The manner in which the Christian Religion was first planted in the world, is an evident demonstration against this supposition of Policy. For it must be owned, that all human power and authority were against the admission of it for some ages, and yet it prevailed against all their opposition.

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tion. And it seems, as if God Almighty, by taking this method of propagating the Christian Doctrine, had designed for ever to silence this objection against those first principles of Religion, upon which the Christian is built. But this consideration will come more properly to be spoken to upon another occasion.

Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, be all honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.

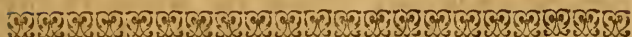


SERMON



SERMON VI.

Preached September the 2^d 1717.



Rom. i. 19, 20, 21.

*Because that which may be known of
God is manifest in them, for God
hath shewed it unto them:*

*For the invisible things of him, from the
creation of the world, are clearly
seen, being understood by the things
that are made, even his eternal Pow-
er and Godhead; so that they are
without excuse:*

*Because that when they knew God, they
glori-*

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glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, &c.



IT is not necessary, to my present undertaking, that I should give an account, either of the main design of the Apostle in this Epistle, (which is principally to shew the necessity, which both Jews and Gentiles were under, of embracing the Gospel of Christ, in order to their justification before God) or of the particular relation, which the words of the Text bear to such a general design; because I intend only to make use of them, as describing that knowledge of God, which the Apostle affirms, that no reasonable and considerate man can easily miss of; since from the beginning of the world, God has always given men sufficient evidence of his own existence, so as to render those men inexcusable, who would not glorify him as God, nor be thankful to him as their Creator and preserver.

However, it may be observed, that the words are laid down as a reason for that Assertion, which goes immediately before them, That, in the Gospel, *The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the*
Truth

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Truth in unrighteousness. The Apostle had just before testified his great readiness to preach the Gospel to the *Romans*, as well as to all others; owning, that he was by no means ashamed of it, how much soever some conceited men might despise the plainness and simplicity of it, as well as the outward meanness with which it appeared in the world; because he was fully convinced, that it was *the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believed it*, both Jew and Gentile. And that which makes this doctrine of the Gospel, when sincerely believed, and heartily embraced, so powerful a means of Salvation, he declares to be this, That *therein the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, i. e.* That method which God hath taken to justify penitent sinners by *Jesus Christ*, is now more clearly discovered, than it was formerly under the *Old Testament*, one degree of faith being added to another, according as the revelation it self, containing motives of persuasion, is improved; though it was faith in God, and not the exact outward observance of a written law, which could render men righteous, or acceptable in the sight of God, even under that former more obscure declaration of his will: for

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* *by works can no flesh be justified, in that all have sinned. But the just shall live by Faith.* But then farther, that which both shews the necessity of such a justification by Christ, and proves the doctrine of the Gospel, to be so powerful a means of bringing men to repentance, and thereby to salvation, is that clear Revelation, which is therein made from heaven, of the wrath of God fully declared *against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, whether Jews or Gentiles, who hold the Truth in unrighteousness.* And that such a declaration of God's displeasure, against all impenitent sinners, is just and reasonable, appears from hence; that God hath always communicated so much natural knowledge of his own Being to mankind, as to render them inexcusable for not glorifying him as God, their maker and benefactor, in the several duties or offices of natural Religion and Morality, in which they had been so grievously deficient. Even the Gentiles had light enough offered them, if they would have attended to it, to condemn their abominable practice, though they chose *darkness rather than light, because their works were evil.* *Because that*
which

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which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God hath shewed it unto them: For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse: Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.

In these words there are two things evidently asserted by the Apostle, both of them directly contrary to those pretences, with which Atheistical men endeavour to skreen themselves from all the terrors of Religion.

One is, That God has, from the beginning of the world, given sufficient manifestations of his own eternal Power and Godhead to mankind by his works, or by what he has plainly done, and daily does in the world.

The other is, That men having such evident means of knowing God, if they either disown or take no notice of his Being; if they neither glorify him as God, nor shew any gratitude towards him, they become utterly inexcusable; and will thereby certainly fall under his just indignation, for their neglect of him.

The first of these Assertions is what I shall at present take notice of. For having already, in my former discourses, endeavoured to shew ;

I. That according to the general sentiments of mankind, there cannot be any perfect morality expected, where there is no belief of the first principles of Religion: And,

II. That therefore all societies of men, which have ever subsisted in any order in the world, have always professed the belief of God's existence, and at least of some kind of providence, and some expectation of divine rewards and punishments: And,

III. That this belief, or universal consent, did not arise from any art, or contrivance, or compact of men, in order to keep one another in awe; but was really antecedent to any such supposed contrivance, and built upon a more universal Principle:

I shall now, according to my intended method, proceed;

IV. To consider, upon what foundation this general belief or persuasion, of which I have
hitherto

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hitherto spoken, is built, or from what original it proceeds. Which I shall take occasion to do from these words of St. *Paul*.

The question now before us is, What sufficient cause there can be assigned for so universal an effect? And the Apostle says, that *what is or may be known of God, is manifest among men, because God hath shewed it unto them*; intimating thereby, That the universal notice which mankind hath of a Deity, is made unto them by God himself; and the way by which he conveys to them this notice, of his own Being and Power, and other knowable Attributes, is by his Works. *For the invisible things of him, even his eternal Power and Godhead, from the creation of the world, are clearly discovered, being understood by the things that are made.* It is not very material to determine, whether the words, *from the creation of the world*, be here to be understood for the *work of creation*, from whence they might collect the power of God the Creator; or to signify the *time of the creation*, when man was first made; the power of God being to be known by all men, from that time, by his works, or by the things that are made and preserved by him.

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For, take the words in either of these senses, the assertion contained under them will come to much the same, and signifies, that God, by his works of creation and providence, both ordinary and extraordinary, hath afforded unto all men, ever since the world began, sufficient means of being convinced of his eternal Power and Godhead: In the judgment therefore of the Apostle, that universal persuasion of mankind, concerning God's existence, is from God himself; and therefore proves his Being. But the name of an Apostle, is of no authority, to persuade those men who disown all revealed Religion; and therefore we must view this argument in another light, and consider the Truth contained in it, only in the way of natural reason and discourse. And in order to this, let us examine the several ways by which so general a persuasion can reasonably be supposed to have prevailed in all ages, as this concerning the Being of God is known to have done; and we shall find, that they all conspire manifestly to prove the truth and certainty of the thing so generally believed. For that all sorts of men, so distant from each other, both in time and place, so different in manners and customs, so disagreeing in their sentiments and opinions about all other mat-
ters,

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ters, and so opposite in their interests, should thus constantly concur in one fundamental opinion; upon which, notwithstanding they have raised such contradictory superstructures, must necessarily prove, that they all have it from some common original, antecedent in nature to all the notions or opinions in which they differ.

Now the several ways, by which this universality of belief can be sufficiently accounted for, may be reduced to these three that follow.

1. This general concurrence in the acknowledgment of a Deity, may proceed from some common Instruction, conveyed down from one to another, from the very beginning of mankind; and by that means derived into the several ages and nations of men. Or,

2. It may, in some measure, arise from the natural Frame or make of every man's mind; disposing him clearly to apprehend the truth and certainty of it, upon the first proposing. Or,

3. It may be discovered as a plain and necessary Conclusion, deducible, by common principles of reason, from what is obvious to the sense, and experience of every considerate man, who will but attend to those effects

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of power, wisdom and goodness, which daily present themselves to him.

It is not necessary to assign any one of these three grounds of persuasion, exclusively of the rest, for this universal consent of mankind, in the matter of which we are now speaking; because we may be fully satisfied, that each of them have their share, either in producing, or continuing, or confirming, this general belief among men; and each of them duly, considered, is a strong evidence for the truth of what is intended to be proved by them. Neither do they at all interfere with one another; for though, according to men's different ways of reasoning, one of them may appear more convincing to one man, and another to another, according as different men turn their attention more to one than to another; yet the asserting of one, does not in the least weaken the force of the other.

The Apostle here in the Text, seems principally to insist upon the last ground of belief, *viz.* That of natural reasoning from the manifest works of God; because he is speaking of those, who professing themselves wise, or assuming the name of philosophers, yet became fools, in this practice of abominable Idolatry, as well as the more ignorant vulgar:
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they became vain in their imaginations or reasonings, while they worshipp'd the creature; which, if they had reasoned justly and carefully, would rather have led them to the acknowledgment and adoration of the Creator; or would have kept up that original notion of God, which the less inquisitive part of mankind had, for a long time, delivered down from one to another. But yet, by this reasoning from the works of God, he does by no means intend to set aside, but rather confirms all the other ways, whereby the knowledge of God is conveyed to mankind. And therefore we may consider each of them separately: And,

1. If we suppose this general concurrence, in the acknowledgment of a Deity, to have proceeded from some common Instruction or institution at first, and so to have been conveyed down, from one age to another, by tradition: This will necessarily lead us to the first original of mankind; and so make it highly credible, that they all, at first, sprung from one common-stock. For, as ^b I have formerly observed, no particular age or nation can be assigned, since mankind was far spread over
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^b See *Serm the iv. and v.*

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the earth, for the beginning of such a tradition, which has been shewn to be much older than all the particular pretenders to it: and therefore, the very first men, must have been some way or other instructed in it. And who can reasonably be supposed to be their master or instructor, but God himself; who first gave them their being, and who might, by some discovery of himself to them, shew them, that to him they ow'd their being? It is not unreasonable to suppose, that God might make a very plain and particular revelation of himself at first, which, while men attended to, they could not easily mistake: or even supposing them to have had, but the same degree of reason and understanding, that men, who are come to years of discretion, now have, they could not easily be either ignorant of, or unconcerned about, their own original; it being the most natural enquiry, that men newly come into being can be supposed to make. Nor is it likely, that they should impute their being to a false cause, when the true one was so very near them; they being but the very first remove from it: and when they saw their own offspring, they would, no doubt, be careful to tell them the same truth: for it cannot well be conceived, that the first
 parents

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parents of mankind, when they were so lately brought into being, should designedly go about to put a cheat upon all their posterity, concerning their own original.

And this gives a reasonable account, how this general persuasion of the Being of God, the maker of all things, might be propagated through all generations and countries. And that it really was so, there are divers very considerable arguments to persuade us; which, though they be not each of them, when taken separately, sufficient to silence all the objections of such men as are disposed to cavil; yet, when they are impartially compared together, they will abundantly satisfy any reasonable and unprejudiced man. And,

1. It is observable, that before the arising of the several Sects of contending Philosophers, it was a general tradition, that the world itself was made by God. This is evident from all the ancient Poets, who have said any thing about the original of things, either designedly at large, or only by way of Episode; as is well known to all that read their writings. And by the manner in which the Poets, that are now extant, introduce their Theology, we may see, that it was the traditional doctrine of Poets yet more ancient. And there

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is no doubt but that the first Poets and Philosophers too, set up upon the stock of Tradition, though, as the world grew older, they found out different ways of embellishing, and by that means of gradually corrupting the ancient doctrine. And as the practice of the world grew on by degrees to more kinds of Idolatry, so the original tradition grew daily more and more debased : but yet so that some lines of primitive truth were preserved under all these disguises. ^c *Aristotle* owns, that all the ancients believed the world was made, though they differed much about the manner of its production. And indeed, when they begun to philosophize about it, and to desert the ancient tradition, they were greatly divided in their opinions. And the love of disputation and the desire of saying something new, and different from others, led them still into greater diversity of opinion : But still the most considerate of them saw a necessity of admitting an infinite Mind for the first Active cause of all things. And ^d *Aristotle* Asserts, that *they who affirmed in former times, that Mind or Understanding was the*
cause

^c *Aristot. de Cælo. lib. I. cap. 10.*

^d *Aristot. Metaph. lib. I. cap. 3.*

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cause of the world and of all order, spoke like men awake and in their senses, among such as talk'd at random. For that all things came together by Chance, or that the present Frame of the world hath been from eternity, or without cause, were, in comparison, very novel as well as unreasonable Doctrines, and the maintainers of each could easily see the absurdity of the other.

2. As to the manner in which the world was produced, there are some reliques of old tradition scattered up and down anciently in most countries, though dress'd up in the guise of Fable and Allegory, suitable to the genius of particular times or nations. Hence the stories of the ancient *Chaos*, of *Night* being the mother of *Day*, or darkness preceding light: ^c of *Water* being the first material principle out of which God made all things, which was the doctrine of *Thales*, but not his own invention: For though *Aristotle* endeavours to make him the first broacher of this opinion, and to shew from what considerations he might be led into it, yet he grants, that

^c Aquam dixit (*Thales*) esse initium rerum: Deum autem eam Mentem quæ ex aquâ cuncta fingeret. *Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. I. cap. 10.*

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that “^f there were some who affirmed, that the
 “ most ancient men, long before that genera-
 “ tion, and even the very first Theologers had
 “ the same notion about the original of Nature,
 “ making *Oceanus* and *Tethys* the fathers of
 “ Generation. And *Water*, that is, *Styx* in
 “ the Poets language, the Oath of the Gods,
 “ as being the most honourable, because most
 “ ancient.” So that after all he is forced to
 own, that he cannot be certain, but that this
 opinion might be much older than *Thales*.

3. That mankind sprung all originally from
 one common stock, was an opinion generally
 received : and that the first of mankind re-
 ceived life, and soul, and understanding im-
 mediately from God, and was made in the
 image of God, and the like, are notions which
 occur very frequently as a common doctrine
 among ancient authors. And upon this foun-
 dation St. *Paul* does not scruple to argue even
 with the *Athenian* Philosophers, and to con-
 demn the common practice of Idolatry by it.
 § *God that made the world and all things*
therein,——and hath made of one blood all
nations

^f Εἰσὶ δέ τινες οἱ καὶ τὰς παμπάλαιας καὶ πολὺ πρὸ τῆς νῦν γε-
 νέσεως καὶ πρώτους θεολογήσαντας ἕτως οἶον) ὡς τῆ φύσεως ἀφλα-
 βῆν, &c. *Metaph. lib. 1. cap. 3.*

§ *Acts 17. 24.*

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nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us : for in him we live, and move, and have our being, as certain also of your own Poets have said, For we are his offspring; for which reason, we ought not to think, that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone graven by human art. All these are much below the nature of Man; and much more below the nature of him who is the original of all things, and of whom Man is but the image and offspring. This was a doctrine of which they could not but have some knowledge before, though Jesus and the Resurrection were things new and strange to them.

4. This is farther confirmed by the general practice of almost all nations, of deducing their first original from some God, to whom they gave special honour. For it being a current tradition among them all, that mankind was from God; and they themselves being by length of time and want of Letters, become ignorant of the manner and circumstances of their own first planting in such a particular country,

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country, were apt to fancy something like the original of mankind to belong particularly to themselves, and to ascribe it to some particular God, after that kind of Idolatry had taken place in the world: just as later nations have taken a fancy to derive their original from *Trojans*, or some other people, which they think very ancient in History; after they have lost the true account of their own real ancestors. Again,

5. It is evident, that, as all men generally believed one Supreme God, the first Maker and Father of all things, whom the Poets call *h The Father of Gods and Men*; so they were universally persuaded, that under him, and above mankind, were divers other degrees of intermediate Beings, to which they gave the name of *Gods*, who were under the government of the Supreme King of the universe. As *Aristotle* says, *i All men are persuaded; that these Gods are under Kingly Government, because many of themselves now, and others anciently were so governed. And as*
men

h Πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε Θεῶν τε.

i Καὶ τῆς Θεᾶς ᾗ Ἀφ' ἧς πάντες Θεοὶ βασιλεύουσιν ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ, οἳ μὲν ἔτι καὶ νῦν, οἳ δὲ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἐβασιλεύοντο· ὥστε καὶ τὰ εἶδη ἑαυτῶν ἀφομοιοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι· ἔτι καὶ τὰς εἰς τὴν Θεῶν.
Arist. Polit. l. 1. cap. 1. in fine.

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men are wont to ascribe to themselves a likeness to the Gods, as in their image, so also in their manner of living. And that these inferior Gods derived their being and all their power from the Supreme God, and that they were his Messengers (or *Angels*) and that some of them did frequently appear to and converse with men upon special occasions, and that God had divers ways of communicating his Will by them, and that they did from him frequently communicate the knowledge of future Events to men, are general opinions, so obvious to any one that reads the ancient heathen writers, that they need not be insisted on. And yet it is hardly conceivable how such opinions should so universally possess mankind, if the ground of them had not been evidently shewn to the first men, and so from them derived down by tradition; for it is certain, that they were generally believed, even when there were hardly any real present facts to support the credit of them.

6. That mankind was originally in a more innocent and more happy state than now it is: And that the Souls of men shall live in a Future State: That good men shall be happy and wicked men miserable: That mankind all, excepting a very few, were once destroyed by

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a deluge of water, for their great wickedness: And that the earth shall at last be destroyed by a conflagration: With divers other opinions of like nature, not easily drawn from any observation obvious to sense, which are frequently to be met withal as vulgar opinions in the writings of the Ancients, may well be ascribed to the same cause, rather than to any reasonings of men; because it is plain, that when length of time, and the mixture of fable and idle Superstition, had so defaced the simplicity of the primitive tradition about divers of them, that the belief of them begun to be worn out, the Philosophers, who pretended to assert them upon grounds of reason, were able to make but few converts. For though the grounds they went upon were good in themselves, yet, being above vulgar apprehensions, they had but little effect, either in supporting or retrieving the ancient doctrine.

7. Lastly, there are several practical Institutions relating to Religious worship, and designed to keep up the sense of God and his Providence, both general and particular, in the minds of men, which have generally prevailed in the world, such as, the offering of Sacrifices, both propitiatory and eucharistical; the offering

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offering of first-fruits and tythes; the setting apart of particular persons to minister in things pertaining to God, the appointing of Festivals, making of vows, invoking the Deity in solemn appeals or oaths, and consulting him by Oracles, in cases of doubt and difficulty.

These and divers other general usages, some of which cannot be accounted for by natural light, prevailing as much as if they had been the result of Nature and Reason (and some perhaps much more than if they had been only such) do plainly imply, that there was at first some one common original from whence they were derived. And though long tract of time, and transplanting into divers countries, separate or contrary interests of different families or contending nations, men's aptness to mistake one another, the love of novelty and change, the particular designs of crafty men, and many other reasons must needs have greatly altered and corrupted the first institution, or most primitive doctrine of Religion and the worship of God; yet still there were such visible remains of it scattered up and down in every nation, as, being compared with one another, would evidently discover, that they all at first sprung from one com-

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mon root, and that mankind in the beginning was instructed by one common master.

This matter might be in some measure confirmed by divers usages, customs and opinions of a civil, and others of an indifferent nature, which have generally obtained in most nations of the world, and yet have either but very little or no foundation in nature, besides ancient and universal practice, or tacit agreement to follow what was once begun. Of this kind, some have taken notice of the manner of counting by decades; which though it have a manifest convenience, making it fit to be continued and farther improved, yet it may be doubted, whether there be any thing in nature leading directly to it, since other ways have also been traditionally followed, though not so universally: The general agreement in the ancient number and order, and, near upon, in the same names of Letters: The composition of Days into Weeks or Hebdomads, of which the reason, fetch'd from the seven Planets, seems to be an invention of Idolaters, long after the thing it self was settled in practice, but the true reason of it lost: Some circumstances relating to Marriage and Affinity, and to Funerals, and a decent interment, and the like, which I shall not insist

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sist upon. I shall but just mention one thing more of this kind, of which I think neither any account can be given from the nature of the thing, nor any instance to contradict the universality of its prevailing, and that is, The respect or preference given to the Right hand above the Left, which as there can be no satisfactory reason given for it, besides the usage of the first men, so there being neither interest nor convenience to induce men to change it, I make no question but it will always continue.

Now the result of all that I have said, under this head, of one original Instruction, derived into the several ages and nations of men by tradition, is this, That though all tradition, by length of time and depravation of manners, be liable to great variation and corruption, yet where there appears something in it that has always continued in substance the same, notwithstanding all the mixtures and additions which time and the corrupt manners of men have made to it, there we may justly suppose, that the first foundation of it, which has so continued, was laid in truth : and applying this to the fundamental principles of Religion, we may well conclude them to be true. And this ground both *Plato*

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and *Tully*, and other eminent Heathen Authors frequently insist upon. But then if some of the things above-mentioned be compared with the first records of our Religion, which justly pretend to be the most ancient writings in the world, the argument will receive much greater strength. And it has accordingly been largely treated of to very good purpose by divers excellent Authors, and particularly by Bishop *Stillingfleet* in his *Origines Sacrae*. I proceed now to mention,

II. The second way by which this universal belief of the first principles of Religion, and more especially of the Being of God, may in some measure arise, and that is from the natural Frame and make of man's Mind, disposing him clearly to apprehend the truth and certainty of it upon the first proposing. I do not here intend to enter into the controversy about innate Idea's, or whether our Idea of God be innate. Only I must observe, that there are some truths so very obvious to the Mind of man, upon his first turning his thoughts towards them, that he cannot, without violence to his own mind, refuse his assent to them. And these coming so readily to be embraced by all men, without any previous reason-

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reasonings, or any observable deductions of one conclusion from another, in the way of argument, have made some men believe them innate. And that the notion of God is of the same kind with those other truths, which are thus fancied by some to be originally in the mind, we have the plain confession of that Sect of Philosophers, who would very willingly have argued against any Being of God at all, if they could, I mean the disciples of *Epicurus*; whose argument is thus represented by *Tully*, in the person of *Velleius*, (as I formerly observed Sermon the IV.) *That since this opinion is founded not upon any institution, or custom, or law, and yet all to a man agree in it: We must of necessity believe that there are Gods, because we have implanted, or rather innate notions of them. And what the nature of all men agrees in must necessarily be true: The Existence of God must therefore be acknowledged.*

I will not undertake entirely to vindicate this argument, in the manner especially as the *Epicureans* made use of it. All that I would infer from it, is this, That the thing was so obvious to their minds, that they could not well either avoid or deny it; and they knew not well how to account for it otherwise

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than by supposing it innate. But now, though we do not suppose the notion of God to be innate, in this strict sense, yet if every man be naturally disposed to receive it, as soon as it is proposed to his understanding, if it break in upon his mind as soon as he comes to the exercise of his Reason, like light to the eyes as soon as they are open and capable of admitting it, ^k as some ancient Authors have express'd the nature of it, then it may justly be called Natural to the mind of man. And that it really is so, we have this plain evidence, that it is, in fact, more difficult for a man to divest himself wholly of this belief, and to subdue all the apprehensions of it, than it is to conquer any other of those common inclinations or aversions which no man scruples to call natural.

There are two things, I know, which are by some thought to be considerable objections against this notion of God's Existence being so natural or evident to the mind of man as is pretended. One is, That there are in the world some nations of men, which have no notion of God or Religion at all. And the other

^k Οὕτω Ἀγatheῖς τὰς ψυχὰς πρὸς αὐτὸ, ὥστε οἶμαι πρὸς τὸ φῶς τὰ βλέποντα. *Julian. Orat. 7. ad Heraclium.* pag. 209.

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other is, the great wickedness of so many men, who live so directly contrary to all sense of God, that they cannot be conceived to have any natural persuasion of his Being. But now I think neither of these objections, if fairly considered, are of any great moment. For,

I. If we should grant that there are some clans of men, as the *Hottentots* for instance, or some such like people, who are so far sunk into brutality, that there appears little or no sign, of any notion of a God or Religion among them, how will this prove, that the notion of God is not natural to a reasonable mind? since it is evident, that they are as void of all other reasonable notions, which men seldom scruple to call *natural* in this sense; and it would be hard to make such creatures the standard of human nature, who have so very little of it, besides something of the outward form. But as little service as the granting or supposing this want of all signs of Religion, in some people, will do, towards proving the notion of a God not to be natural to mankind; yet there is no occasion to grant even this; because, by the most exact accounts taken from those who lived upon the spot with these *Hottentots*, and had best opportunity of knowing their customs, they do
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sometimes pray to a Being that dwells above, and offer sacrifice of milk, and the best things they have, with eyes lifted up to heaven. And even those Travellers, who had not so long opportunity of observing thus much among them, yet allow, that they have some shew of religious rejoycing at the New and Full Moon. Now these people are by all allowed to be the most degenerate of the human species, and to *have survived the common instincts of Humanity*: [See Ovington's *Voyage to Surat*, p. 498.] And therefore, as to what some have affirmed of several other people in different corners of *America*, that have been without any notion or belief of a God, we have still less reason to give any credit to it. Those who make such relations concerning them, having either been their mortal enemies, who have said the very worst things they could think of, to excuse their own inhuman cruelty towards them; or else mere strangers among them, utterly ignorant both of their language and customs, and not very inquisitive into any thing besides their Gold, or other treasure, but what appeared at first: and such persons not finding any signs of such Religion or Superstition, as themselves had been used to, presently concluded they

had

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had none. And should such sort, either of prejudiced or incurious travellers, come into some parts, of even the best Countries of *Europe*, where they understood as little, and did not happen to see any of their Religious worship, they might, perhaps, be apt to make the very same relation of them.

But it is certain, that both the first discoverers of those places, who went with less prejudice, and the most understanding persons since, who have been conversant among them, and examined them most narrowly, do agree; that they all own a God, or supreme good Being, though they have very different notions of his perfections, and of the manner of worshipping him; and that most of them also believe a Future State, in which the conditions of good and bad men will be very different*.

2. As to the wickedness of such numbers of men in all countries, who live in contradiction to any firm and certain belief of a God, which is urged as an argument, that the notion of him is not so natural as is pretended,

I think

* See this matter made out from good authority by bishop Stillingfleet, in the new part of his *Orig. Sacr. book. I. chap. I. pag. 73.*

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I think it may be truly replied, that mens thus holding the Truth in unrighteousness, is rather an evidence, that some notion of that Truth is natural. For if they, whose practice makes it their interest, that there should be no God; and who are forced to labour hard, to shut their eyes against all the consequences of believing, can yet seldom be able to bring themselves to hold out in denying him; 'tis a sign the light strikes strong upon them, even while they seek to shut it out: The notion is so natural that they cannot get rid of it, but that it will be returning upon them, let them do what they can to prevent it; in so much, that they find out the most absurd ways of corrupting the natural notion of God by superstition, because they cannot quite discard it; and yet are unwilling to part with the pleasures of sin, as they ought, if they would pursue the just consequences of it. I cannot, indeed, call these men properly Believers in a religious sense, but they are certainly in the number of those, who profess to know God, though in works they deny him: And they shew how difficult it is to oppose, and how extravagant and unreasonable to deny, a truth, which our own nature will every day remind us of. It is like going against a natural instinct,

which

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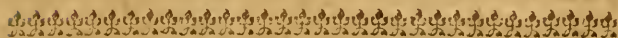
which to all other creatures is esteemed a certain guide. And if we would be led by this judgment of nature, which the consent of all ages has, in effect, vouched to be such, we need not fear mistaking, if we determine man to be naturally a Religious, as well as Reasonable Creature.





S E R M O N VII.

Preached *October* the 7th 1717.



Rom. i. 19, 20, 21.

*Because that which may be known of
God is manifest in them, for God
hath shewed it unto them:*

*For the invisible things of him, from the
creation of the world, are clearly
seen, being understood by the things
that are made, even his eternal Pow-
er and Godhead; so that they are
without excuse:*

*Because that when they knew God, they
glori-*

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glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, &c.



HERE are, as I hinted in my last Discourse, Two things evidently asserted by the Apostle, in these words, which are both of them directly contrary to those pretences, with which Atheistical men endeavour to skreen themselves from the terrors of Religion :

One is, *That God has, from the beginning of the world, given sufficient manifestations of his own eternal Power and Godhead to mankind, by his works, or by what he has plainly done, and still continues to do, in the world :*

The other is, *That men having sufficient means of knowing God, if they either disown, or take no notice of his Being; if they neither glorify him as God, nor shew any gratitude towards him, they become thereby utterly inexcusable, and will therefore certainly fall under his just indignation, for their neglect of him.*

The first of these Assertions is what I am now upon; and have, in some part, before spoken to; in shewing, upon what foundation the general belief or persuasion of the Being

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ing of God is built, or from what original it proceeds.

Two grounds of this I have already considered, *viz.*

I. Some common Instruction at the first, conveyed down from one to another, from the very beginning of mankind, and by that means derived into the several ages and nations of men: And,

II. The natural Frame or make of every man's mind, disposing him clearly to apprehend the truth and certainty of it, upon the first proposing. And from these two, impartially considered, I hope it will appear, that so universal a consent of mankind, ought not to be despised, as a thing ill grounded; but that we may justly reckon it, (as *Tully* calls it,) ^a *A Law of nature*: Not an uncertain *opinion* founded upon fiction, but one of those judgments or determinations of nature ^b which cannot be destroyed, but confirmed; by length of time and observation of the nature of things. I proceed therefore to the

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III. Third

^a *Cic. Tusc. 1. cap. 13.*

^b *Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicio confirmat. Balb. apud Cic. de N. D. l. 2. cap. 2.*

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III. Third ground of this universal persuasion of the Being of God, *viz.* The common principle of Reason deducing this, as a plain and necessary consequence or conclusion, from the observation of those visible Effects of power, wisdom and goodness, which are obvious to every considerate man, who will but attend to them. I do not suppose, that this is the way by which the generality of men first come to their notion of a Deity, for that is certainly to be attributed rather to the two foregoing grounds. But that which confirms and improves this notion, in those that are already prepossessed with it by tradition, or the natural working of their own mind, that which gives them entire satisfaction about the truth and certainty of it, when any doubts arise about those former impressions, is the serious consideration of the mighty works of providence, which they cannot help observing when they turn their eyes towards the visible world. To this purpose, *Tully*, in the person of *Balbus*, commends an observation of *Aristotle's*^c, which is to this effect: *Suppose*, says he, *there were some men who had al-*
ways

^c Præclarè ergo Aristoteles, si essent, inquit qui sub terrâ semper habitavissent, &c. Vide *Cicer. de Nat. Deor. lib. 2. cap. 37.*

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ways lived under ground, though in convenient and noble apartments, finely adorned, and furnished with all such accommodations, as tend to make the life of man easy in such a condition; but yet had never at any time come from under the earth, but had only heard of a Deity, or Divine Power, by report: Now suppose that these same subterraneous men should some time after, by the opening of the earth, come out of their hidden regions, into this habitable world, and be surprized with a clear view of the earth, and the sea, and the heavens, and should observe the vastness of the clouds, and the force of winds; and seeing the sun, should consider its magnitude, splendour, and prodigious influence; how it makes day, by diffusing its light through the whole heaven: And when the night shades the earth, imagine them to behold, the whole heaven adorned with stars of different magnitude, and the various phases of the moon, and to observe, the constant, regular, and perpetual motion, of all the heavenly bodies: when they have seen and considered all these things, they would undoubtedly conclude, that there is a Deity, and that all these great and stupendous things are his workmanship. Thus, in the opinion

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of *Aristotle*, this would be a very natural way of arguing. And he is by no means singular in his judgment of the matter; since all other, even heathen, writers, both before and after him, who have in earnest endeavoured to persuade men of the being of a God and a Providence, have ever look'd upon this as a very convincing argument: And *Tully* particularly, from whom we have the forementioned passage of *Aristotle*, is very copious upon this subject, where he designedly treats of it, in the person of a *Stoic*, and thinks that ^d *Philosophers*, *what rude apprehensions soever they might have upon the the first imperfect view of the world, yet when they come to observe the determinate and uniform motions of it, and how all are governed by stated laws, in unchangeable order, and constant regularity, ought to understand, that there is not only some understanding inhabitant in this heavenly and divine fabrick, but also a*
Ruler,

^d ---Sic philosophi debuerunt si forte eos primus aspectus mundi conturbaverat, postea cum vidissent motus ejus finitos & æquabiles, omniaque ratis ordinibus moderata, immutabilique constantia, intelligere inesse aliquem non solum habitatorem in hac cœlesti ac divinâ Domo, sed etiam rectorem moderatorem & tanquam architectum tanti operis, tantique muneris. *Cic. de Nat. D. l. 2. cap. 35.*

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Ruler, Governour, and Architect, of so great and admirable a work. And he says, that they are so far from being worthy of the character of philosophers, ^e that they do not deserve the name of men, (or rational creatures) who, when they see the constant motion of the heavens, and the established order of the stars, and all things so corresponding with, and depending upon, each other, in such an admirable harmony, should yet deny that there is reason and wise design in them; or should imagine that such great things were made by chance, which shew a wisdom so vastly superior to all that we can exert in the discovery of them. And in divers other places of his writings, where he mentions this occasionally, as his own argument, he insists upon it, as what no man of common sense can reasonably contradict^f. And indeed, when the

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question

^e Quis enim hunc hominem dixerit, qui, cum tam certos cœli motus, tam ratos astrorum ordines, tamque omnia inter se connexa & apta viderit, neget in his ullam esse rationem; eaque casu fieri dicat, quæ quanto consilio gerantur, nullo consilio assequi possumus, *ib. cap. 38.*

^f Quid est enim verius quàm neminem esse oportere tam stultè arrogantem, ut in se mentem & rationem putet inesse, in cœlo mundoque non putet? aut ea, quæ vix summa ingenii ratione comprehendat, nullâ ratione moveri putet? *ib. 2. de Legg.*

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question is, whether all things exist, in such a manner as they do, by mere chance, or by virtue of a superintending Mind, infinitely wise, and good, and powerful, the proper way of determining it, is to appeal to the things themselves, and to see what characters of wisdom, goodness and power, they evidently bear; and if the more curiously we search into them, and the more attentively we observe them, we find these marks and signatures still more and clearer in every one of them, it must needs so much the more weaken all our suspicions of chance having any hand in them, and so much more confirm our belief or opinion of a wise, and good, and powerful Being, presiding over them, and directing all their motions. ^s When we see any fine piece of movement, as a sphere or a clock, or any other curious machine, we make no scruple to say, that it is the work of Reason and Art, though we see not the Artist: and when we behold the admirable motions of the heavenly bodies, of which all other movements are but a faint copy; and consider, with what regularity and uniformity their constant

^s An' cū machinatione quadam moveri aliquid videmus, ut sphæram, ut horas, ut alia permulta; non dubitamus quin illa opera sint rationis; cū autem impetum cœli, &c. *Cic. de N. D. lib. 2. c. 38.*

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stant revolutions are performed, through so many ages, without any mistake or failure, without any disorder or impediment to each other, notwithstanding their vast bulk, and prodigious swiftness; can we doubt, whether they be contrived, governed and directed, by a most excellent and divine Reason? And as this will naturally excite our admiration of that Supreme Being, whose power and wisdom manages all things; so, in reason, it ought to create in us the highest veneration for him and the strongest sense of gratitude towards him, when we are made partakers of so much good from these works of his. It is therefore with good reason, that the Apostle (here in the text) lays so great stress upon this Argument from the frame of the world; and declares those men, in the mere light of nature, inexcusable, who, having such means of knowing God, yet did not glorify him as God, nor shewed themselves thankful to him; because, by their own confession, every part of the Creation, proclaims a wisdom and power in its Author, so much above all possible productions of chance, that it infinitely exceeds, even the most exalted human understanding, perfectly to comprehend it. And by the like confessi-

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on, ^h *all the parts of the world are so well constituted, that they could neither be more convenient for use, nor more beautiful for shew, than they are.* And therefore some of them have owned, ⁱ *that he ought not to be counted for a man, who is not moved to gratitude, by the beautiful order of the stars, by the pleasing vicissitude of day and night, by the grateful mixture and contemperation of the seasons, and by all those things which are so bountifully produced for our use and benefit.* So that this argument, drawn from the order of the world, and the several parts of it, does, to the common apprehension of mankind, not merely prove the Being of a God, but likewise shews, what kind of Being he is, by demonstrating these his principal Attributes of power, wisdom and goodness, which are the foundation of all natural Religion; the want or abuse of which, the Apostle so severely charges upon the Heathen world in

^h --- Quòd si omnes mundi partes ita constitutæ sunt ut neque ad usum meliores potuerint esse, neque ad speciem pulchriores, videamus utrùm ea fortuita sint, &c. *Cic. de Nat. D. l. 2. cap. 34.*

ⁱ Quem verò astrorum ordines, quem dierum noctiumq; vicissitudines, quem mensium temperatio, quemque ea quæ gignuntur nobis ad fruendum, non gratum esse cogant, hunc hominem omnino numerare qui decet? *Cic. de Legg. l. 2.*

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in this chapter. And the due improvement of this Argument, is a proper employment for the minds of all speculative men, who are inquisitive into the works of Nature, which are a subject that will never be exhausted, but the more they are searched into, the greater matter they will always gradually afford for admiration and praise, of the infinite perfections of their Author.

But because my intended method will not allow me to pursue this Argument at large, through all the several branches of it, there being no part of the Creation which does not, when viewed in a proper light, afford ample matter for the proof and illustration of a Divine wisdom presiding over it: and because there are already, many excellent treatises upon this subject, made by persons of great ability in natural and experimental knowledge, which, no doubt, will be constantly encreasing; I shall, at present, chuse to mention only some such general considerations, as may be most easily applied to those observations, which almost any man of common capacity, with a moderate attention, may make for himself.

Now if we consider, either the stupendous Magnitude and extent of the whole Creation;

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tion; or the prodigious Number and variety of creatures contained in it; or the exquisite Minuteness of the several parts of which they consist; or the Beauty, order and regularity, of every distinct species; or the Harmonious correspondence of each part of nature to the other, even in the inanimate part of the world; or if we contemplate the Curious structure of so many vastly different sorts of animals, and how exactly they are all fitted to their several states and conditions of life, and what provision is made for the preservation and continuance of their several kinds: or, lastly, if we consider Man, the principal inhabitant of this visible part of the world, which falls most within our notice, we shall evidently perceive such manifest tokens of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, as cannot be ascribed to any thing but a Providence, or mind, infinitely perfect in all these Attributes.

I. If we consider the amazing Magnitude and extent of the whole Creation, it gives us a notion of power incomprehensible, in the production and preservation of it. We cannot say indeed, that the creation is, properly and strictly speaking, infinite, or without all possible bounds, but only that the limits of it
are

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are to us, or perhaps to any created mind, unsearchable. Its extent is beyond all the power of sight which we have or can have from the assistance of the best Telescopes. The distance from the Earth to the Sun is prodigiously greater than perhaps any man, who is not something acquainted with Astronomical Speculations, would easily conceive^k. And yet, how vast soever this distance is, it is very inconsiderable in comparison of the distance from the fix'd Stars, which are visible to our naked eye; and yet more so in comparison of those which are so remote as not to be seen without the best glasses: and how many more there may be, which by reason of their vastly greater distance are invisible, we cannot guess, though we have reason to believe them to be an inconceivable number. And these being all supposed like Suns, to so many several systems of other Planets attending them, must require such an immense space, for their several revolutions, without interfering with one another, as is almost beyond all human conception to imagine. And then

2. If we consider the prodigious Number
and

^k Being according to the most exact calculation, 21600 semi-diameters of the Earth, i. e. above 86 Millions of English Miles. 86,051,398. Derham's *Astro-Theology*.

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and Variety of creatures contained in this immense space, it shews a wisdom and contrivance equal to that infinite power which produced them. If we view only this Earth, with which we are best acquainted, as having the nearest means of knowing it, which is but a point, as it were, in comparison of the Universe, what an amazing variety does it afford us? Under the earth, how many kinds of fossils, stones, gems, minerals, metals? Upon the surface, what an incredible number of vegetables, trees, plants, shrubs, grasses, with their several distinct seeds, leaves, flowers and fruits? Upon the Earth, in the Water, and in the Air, how many thousand sorts, or tribes, of Animals of different bulk and figure, beasts, reptils, birds and insects? And if the various kinds are so many, how numberless are the individuals of each kind? It might also be observed, that there is a wonderful variety among the individuals themselves of the same *species*. Even in several nations of mankind only there is such an incredible diversity, as to colour, stature, language, and the like, as made even ¹ *Pliny* himself say, that *the*
power

¹ Naturæ verò rerum vis atque majestas in omnibus momentis fide caret; si quis modò partes ejus ac non totam complectatur Animo. *Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. 7. cap. 1.*

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power and majesty of nature, in every particular instance, is beyond all belief, to a man that considers only some parts, and has not a view of the whole in his mind. And a little after, he instances in that ^m inimitable variety in the faces of men, of which not one of so many thousands is so like another as not to be easily distinguish'd. If we extend our views and thoughts farther, and consider, that the number of fix'd Stars, especially since the improvement of Telescopes, is not so much as pretended to be guessed at; and that the Planets about them may be replenished with creatures, both animate and inanimate, as different in kind, as they are distant in place, from those with which we are acquainted, is very probable; and there may be as many more kinds of them, and as many more individuals of each kind as the places they are lodged in will contain: What an astonishing multiplication of their numbers and variety will this then amount to? 'Tis here the excess of power and wisdom, so infinitely beyond our capacity, and not the want

^m Jam in facie vultuque nostro, cum sint decem, aut paulò plura membra, nullas duas in tot millibus hominum indiscretas effigies existerè: quod ars nulla in paucis numero præstet affectando.

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want of it, which dazzles our understanding; as the excessive light of the sun blinds our eyes. But

3. On the other hand, if we pry into the exquisite Minuteness of the several parts of which each distinct creature, either animate or inanimate, is composed, this will still heighten our admiration of the infinite skill of the Artificer, who framed them. There are millions of entire and perfect animals, endued with life and motion, so very small, that they cannot easily be discerned by the naked eye; which yet, by the help of Microscopes, are discovered to have their several organical parts as curiously framed, and fitted to their several motions and uses, as those of a much larger size: and how surprizingly small must those parts be, singly taken, when a compounded body, made up of so great a number, is hardly big enough to be visible? The like may be said for the fine texture of the minute parts of larger animals, and even of plants and all other distinct kinds of vegetables, of which the first *stamina* are so small, as to be imperceptible to our unassisted senses. And even the more simple and seemingly less compounded bodies, of how infinitely small particles do they consist? Who can by his senses discover

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discover the figure of the constituent parts of fluids, which yet are not so closely united, but that there is much vacuity between them? Who can discern the texture of the parts of Water, which makes it so difficult to be compressed by any human force? Or, who ever saw the figure of the particles of air or wind? which though compressible, yet how great is their force of resistance? So that the *minima naturæ* are as much beyond our capacities to discover, as the magnitude of the Universe. What an infinite Wisdom then must it be, how intense, as well as extensive, which at once so intimately reaches, and so accurately manages both these extremes? For,

4. If we consider the Beauty, order and regularity of every distinct species of things, the accuracy of the Divine Artificer will still farther appear. Though the number of his works be so incomprehensibly great, and their kinds so various, yet each of them singly is directed, performed and finished, with as much skill and exactness, as if it were the only thing attended to. Every one of the particulars is wrought with more art and curiosity than any human Artist, though he were to spend all his time and pains upon it, can attain to imitate. What our blessed Saviour says of the flowers

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flowers of the field, that *even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*, is no hyperbolical expression. The most curious polishing, gilding or painting of human art, cannot vye with that of some small insects, seeds and flowers. An excellent Author, well skilled in these matters, has told us, that ⁿ*the observations which have been made in these latter times, by the help of the Microscope, discover a vast difference between natural and artificial things. Whatever is natural and beheld through that, appears exquisitely formed and adorned with all imaginable elegancy and beauty. There are such inimitable gildings and embroideries in the smallest seeds of plants, but especially in the parts of animals, in the head or eye of a small fly; such accuracy, order and symmetry in the frame of the most minute creatures, a louse, for example, or a mite, as no man were able to conceive without seeing of them. Whereas the most curious works of art, the sharpest, finest, needle doth appear as a blunt rough bar of iron coming from the furnace or the forge. The most accurate engravings, or embossments*
seem

ⁿ Bp. Wilkins of Nat. Rel. lib. i. ch. 6.

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seem such rude, bungling, deformed works, as if they had been done by a mattock or a trowel. So vast a difference is there betwixt the skill of Nature and the rudeness and imperfection of Art. Nor is the order, regularity and proportion, constantly observed in the several parts of the visible creation, less to be admired than the beauty and elegance of each of them. That so many degrees of creatures, animate and inanimate, should be always constantly kept in their proper rank, so that they appear to be the same through all generations, notwithstanding every thing is in some sort of perpetual motion, is utterly repugnant to the nature of Chance; and must argue a wise Director, that orders all things in number, weight and measure. Again,

5. The Harmonious Correspondence of each part of Nature to other, shews a comprehensive Wisdom, that has one entire view of all things at once, such a skill as has no occasion to mend or new model one part of its work, to make it fit for another; but which makes both great and small parts answer one another so exactly, that notwithstanding all the multifarious motions, and directions of motion, in the world, there is no
P
disorder

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disorder or disturbance created thereby in the whole ; but every part, and every motion of that part, is as well preserved, as if all the rest had been particularly designed for that only. And though we can never be able to discover all the uses and designs, for which every particular part of the creation was made or to which it serves ; yet from what we can discover, we may reasonably conclude, that every part has its use in the whole, and that every thing is wisely suited to some excellent purpose or other, though we cannot find it out. An unskilful man, that transiently looks upon some curious engine, consisting of many fine parts and intricate motions of great variety , cannot readily discern to what use every particular wheel or pin serves ; yet if he sees the general use of the whole, he would be esteemed a fool indeed, if he should immediately conclude, that this or that part had no use at all, because he could not presently discover to what end it served. So for us to pretend, to know all the uses for which every particular part of the creation was made, or to which it may be applied, is great arrogance, proceeding from want of experience : to think they were designed for no use , is a weakness easily confuted by those who have
more

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more skill: and to deny that things were designed for those uses, to which we see them always constantly answer; is as manifestly unreasonable, and argues very narrow conceptions of the Divine Knowledge and Design; as if he could not intend things for the uses we do know, because he designed them for more than we know: for this must be the result of their reasonings, who forbid us to take notice of, or enquire after, final Causes: But many relations and correspondences of things we can evidently see, being more nearly concerned in them; and consequently may know some of their obvious and manifest uses for which they were made. As for instance; We can perceive a manifest fitness in the organs of sensation, of every animal, to those *objects* with which it has occasion to converse, and to the *medium*, through which it is to perceive them, in such a manner as conduces most to its preservation. Thus the *eye*, and visible *objects*, and *light*; by which those objects are seen, have such a mutual respect to each other; that, if any one were wanting, the other would be imperfect or useless. And the like may be said of the *ear* and *sounds*, and the *undulation* of *air* by which those sounds are conveyed. And so for the

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other senses and their respective objects. And thus in every part of nature which we have any tolerable acquaintance withal; even from the vast heavenly bodies, as the Sun, Moon and Planets, down to the smallest insect upon our earth; we may observe one thing suited to another, with the most exact congruity: So that we may say, All Nature is but one mighty work of one Almighty and All-wise Architect.

But then that there is a Goodness, as well as wisdom and power, shewn in the formation of all things, does more evidently appear from the Animal and Rational Part of the world, from those things which, being endued with sensation, are thereby capable of pleasure and satisfaction; as all the creatures, which have animal life, are in some degree: for they all rejoyce in and are well pleased with their being. And therefore,

6. If we contemplate the curious structure of so many different species of Animals, and observe how exactly they are all fitted in their very outward make and figure, as well as inward dispositions and instincts, to their several respective states and conditions of life; and what suitable provision is made for their satisfaction, as well as for the preservation,
conti-

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continuance and propagation of their several kinds, we cannot easily forbear to admire the Bounty as well as Wisdom of Providence appearing therein. I do not here design to enter upon an exact description, either of the various kinds of Animals, or the particular structure of all the several parts of any one animal, or so much as to shew the exquisite formation of any particular part, much less all the several uses to which such parts are made to serve: Such particular descriptions of things require a long discourse, and are much better apprehended by ocular inspection, than by any discourse whatever which can be made without it. I can only hint at a few of those things which are obvious and easy to be observed, but not to be accounted for without a superintending Providence. Such, for instance, is the distinction of Sexes in all Animals (that being the means by which the species is continued) and the due proportion of the numbers of each sex to the other, which has been constantly kept from the beginning. This quite destroys all supposition of spontaneous, or æquivocal generation, even in lesser Animals, and shews the absurdity of imagining, that any real animal, and especially mankind, could ever be produced by Chance, or a ca-

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fual motion and concourfe of atoms of which they confift. For not to infift upon the exquisite formation of all the internal as well as external parts of each Animal, in which we cannot obferve any thing either fuperfluous or deficient; how is it poffible, if they hadprung up out of the earth like mufhrooms, that fo nice a proportion of Sexes fhould be kept in their firft production, and that they fhould by natural inftinct know, that they were mutually defigned for each other, and that the fucceeding generations were to be produced in a way fo very different from the firft? Such again is the mighty care which Animals have of their young, both to feed and defend them, till they are able to fhift for themfelves; The ftrange different natural inftincts of various creatures, and yet, in all of the fame fpecies, constantly the fame; each Animal knowing and providing its proper food and fhunning what is improper: The natural fenfe which every creature has of its own proper weapon of defence, and the way of using it without teaching, as well as of the enemies it is to fecure itfelf againft: The wonderful fagacity, diligence and application of fome creatures: The admirable art and contrivance of fome, even very fmall animals, in

forming

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forming their own places of habitation or security with the greatest exactness. These things shew, that though they do not direct themselves, yet they are directed by a constant and unerring wisdom. Again, if we consider the convenient structure and apt disposition of the several parts of the different kinds of creatures, as Beasts, Birds and Fishes, how they are fitted to their several Elements, and the ways of living in them; so that how different soever their bulk or figure be, yet we cannot say, but that each of them is most conveniently adapted to its own region, and to the procuring that food which it is to live upon, and to the providing that security and defence which is most proper for it; this is an instance of wisdom and foresight constantly suiting proper means to their respective ends.

To use the words of an excellent Author (Dr. Barrow) upon this occasion: “ Thus
 “ much is palpably manifest, that each of
 “ these so many curious organs was designed
 “ and fitted on purpose to that chief use or
 “ operation we see it to perform; This of
 “ them, to continue the kind, that to preserve
 “ the *individuum*: This to discern what is

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“ necessary, convenient or pleasant to the
 “ creature, or what is dangerous, offensive, or
 “ destructive thereto, that to pursue or em-
 “ brace, to decline or shun it: This to en-
 “ joy what is procured of good, that to re-
 “ move what is hurtful or useless, or to guard
 “ from mischief or injury. That each one
 “ is furnished with apt instruments suitable to
 “ its particular needs, appetites, capacities, sta-
 “ tions, is most apparent. Whence could all this
 “ proceed? Whence came all these parts to
 “ be so fashioned and suited, all of them so
 “ necessary, or so convenient, that none, with-
 “ out the imperfection and the prejudice of
 “ the creature, some not without its destru-
 “ ction, can be wanting? Who shaped and
 “ tempered those hidden subtle springs of life,
 “ sense, imagination, memory, passion? Who
 “ impressed on them a motion so regular and
 “ so durable, which through so many years,
 “ among so many adverse contingencies af-
 “ flicting it, is yet so steadily maintained?
 “ Can this proceed from giddy Chance or
 “ blind Necessity?——” And again, “ All
 “ that grace and beauty, which so delights
 “ our sense beholding it, all that correspon-
 “ dence and symmetry which so satisfies our
 “ mind

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“ mind considering it, all that virtue and energy extending to performances so great and admirable, must they be ascribed to causes of no worth, and supposed done to no purpose ?

I might farther take notice more particularly of the exquisite formation and disposition of the several organs of sensation, as the eye, the ear, and the rest, and with what wonderful contrivance and nicety they are adapted in every creature, to their proper business and manner of life: And though they are so curious and of so fine a structure, yet how well they are guarded against any thing that may hurt or annoy them. But I forbear to insist upon these things, both because they have been often handled, in distinct Treatises upon them, to more advantage; and because the whole animal œconomy is so apparently the work of wisdom and design, that hardly any one has been well acquainted with it, though in other respects not very forward in owning any sentiments of Religion, but has yet, by the irresistible evidence of the thing, been brought to confess a wise contrivance in it; as *Aristotle, Pliny, Galen* and others, among the ancients; and divers others of later times.

Ari-

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° *Aristotle* not only constantly affirms it as an axiom, that Nature [and sometimes that God and Nature] does nothing in vain, or without reason and design; and that all natural things ^p are done for some end; and that ^q Nature always does the best that is possible, in as constant a manner as Art: so that if there be any evidence of design in things artificial, there is the same in things natural, the end and means in each being manifestly suited to one another: but in the introduction to his Treatise, *of the parts of Animals*, he asserts, ^r that *there is more of design and beauty (or good) in the works of nature, than in the works of art*: and indeed, he every where lays great stress upon final causes, which of necessity suppose a wise Agent: ^s *This*, he says,

° 'Ο ὃ Θεὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις ἑδὲν μάτῳ ποιοῦσιν. *Arist. de celo. lib. 1. cap. 4.* Ἡ δὲ φύσις ἑδὲν ἀλόγως ἑδὲ μάτῳ, ποιεῖ. *ib. lib. 2. cap. 11.*

^p Ἐνεκά τῃ γὰρ ἅπαντα ὑπάρχει τὰ φύσει, ἢ συμπλάμαζα ἔσται ἢ ἔνεκά τῃ. *Lib. 3. De Anima. cap. 12.*

^q 'Εἰ δὲ τὰ κατὰ τέχνην ἔνεκά τῃ, δηλονότι καὶ τὰ κατὰ φύσιν, ὁμοίως γὰρ ἔχει πρὸς ἀλλήλα ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τέχνην καὶ ἐν τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν, τὰ ὑπερὰ πρὸς τὰ πρότερον. *Arist. Physic. lib. 2. cap. 8.* where he has much more to this purpose, very well worth observing.

^r Μᾶλλον δ' ἐστὶ τὸ ὃ ἔνεκα καὶ τὸ καλὸν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ φύσεως ἔργοις, ἢ ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τέχνης. *De partib. Anim. lib. 1. cap. 1.*

^s Μάλιστα ὃ φανερόν ἐπὶ τῶν ζώων ἢ ἄλλων, ἃ ἔτε τέχνη ἔτε ζητήσαντα

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says, is manifest in those animals, which work neither by art, nor enquiry, or learning, nor upon deliberation: which makes some doubt, whether it be not by a mind or understanding, that spiders and other insects work; but if we proceed a little farther, there is the same appearance of final causes, or a tendency towards an end, or design, even in plants; as that the leaves are made for the covering of the fruit, &c.

^c Pliny in most cases goes upon Epicurean principles; and shews no such sense of the fundamental principles of Religion, as Aristotle does, and yet even he cannot forbear admiring the wonderful Art and Contrivance of nature, even in the smallest animals; and he instances particularly in the body of a gnat, which yet, he truly owns, is not the least of any

ζητήσαντα ἕτε βελούτάμενα ποιεῖ· διὸ ἀπορᾷσί τινες πότερον νῶ ἢ τινι ἄλλῳ ἐργάζονται οἱ τε ἀράχνη καὶ οἱ μύρμηκες καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα. καὶ μικρὸν δ' ἔτι περὶ ὀνίγ καὶ ἐν τοῖς φυτοῖς φαίνεται τὰ συμφέροντα γινόμενα πρὸς τὸ τέλος, οἷον τὰ φύλλα ἕνεκα τῆς καρπῶσκέπης, &c. φυσικ. ἀπορ. lib. 2. cap. 8.

^c ---Nusquam alibi spectatiore naturæ rerum artificio. Plin. H. Nat. l. xi. cap. 1, 2.

In his tam parvis tamque nullis quæ ratio, quanta vis, quam inextricabilis perfectio? Ubi tot sensus collocavit in culice, & sunt alia dictu minora, &c. Plin. ib.

---Cum rerum natura nusquam magis quam in minimis tota sit.

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any, the exquisite formation of which he describes with wonderful elegance.

Galen in his book *De usu Partium*, hath such remarkable observations to this purpose, that most of those, who have treated upon this subject, have taken notice of them, as being full of expressions, acknowledging not only a wonderful wisdom and power, but goodness also, manifest in the contrivance of the Animal structure: Even ^v *Mr. Hobbes* himself, who is never suspected of having too elevated or noble thoughts of Providence, yet confesses, that those who thoroughly consider all the curiously contrived organs of generation and nutrition, and can think they were not ordered and designed to their several ends and offices by an understanding mind, ought to be look'd on, as persons void of all mind and understanding themselves.

Now as curious as all this Animal structure is, and as capable as it is of receiving grateful sensations, by the exquisite make of so many different organs, so there is a like variety of provision made in nature, to satisfy every one of them, in a way suitable to its capacity; inasmuch as all the inanimate part of the

^v *Hobbes De Homine, cap. 1.*

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Creation, is fitted to minister to the preservation, satisfaction and delight, of the animate; there being no living creature so contemptible, but what has ample provision made for it. Even all the senses of Animals have provision made for their grateful entertainment, and to all such distances as those senses will reach. Can the eye be gratified with seeing, and is there not provided an infinite variety of colours and figures, of leaves, flowers and fruits, of great beauty and delight to be seen, and Light, a pleasant medium, to see them by? And to man, especially, the heavenly bodies, at a prodigious distance, afford a very entertaining prospect. And is there not a proper provision made likewise for the ear, in that infinite variety of sounds, with which nature abounds? And so for all the senses, to some or other of which, almost every thing is contrived to minister something of comfort and delight. And on the contrary, how few are the things, and how easily avoided, that are greatly ungrateful to any one of them? no more than what may seem designed on purpose, to set off those that are grateful to more advantage, and to give us a more sensible relish of them. “ So many, so plain, and so exactly congruous, (says the forenamed Author) are the
“ rela-

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“ relations of things here about us to each
 “ other, which surely could not otherwise
 “ come, than from one admirable Wisdom
 “ and Power, conspiring thus to adapt and
 “ connect them together; as also from an e-
 “ qual Goodness, declared in all these things,
 “ being squared so fitly for mutual benefit and
 “ convenience.”

Methinks, when a man considers this seriously, (and it well becomes every man to consider it) he can hardly forbear breaking out in language like that of the Psalmist, *“ O Lord, how manifold are thy works? in wisdom hast thou made them all, the earth is full of thy riches, &c.*

7. Lastly, If we consider Man; the principal inhabitant of this lower world, with whom we have most opportunity of being acquainted, our notions of these Attributes of God must needs be more strongly impressed upon us; the evidence for them being, as it were, brought home to our selves. And whatever has been hitherto hinted at, either of the curious structure of the bodies of other animals, or of the provision made to preserve and support them, or to please and gratify their natural

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tal sensations, is yet more eminently to be observed in man, to whom Providence has been bountiful in an higher degree, as having manifestly designed him for nobler purposes: and has accordingly distinguished him in figure from the rest of the creatures, all of which he has, in some measure, made subservient to him: In so much, that even * *Pliny* himself owns, that *nature seems to have produced all other things for his sake*; though he complains at the same time, as many other Atheistical persons have both before and since done, of her being a cruel *Step-mother* to him, in that he is not so immediately provided, with the conveniences of food and clothing of his own, as other creatures are. But this complaint is both ungrateful and absurd: 'tis as if a prince or a governor of a city should complain, that he has not time to dress his own meat, or make his own shoes. 'Tis indeed true, that man is not by nature so immediately, and without his own industry, provided with food and clothing of his own, as some other creatures are: but this is no defect in the goodness of Providence towards him; because he has Reason given him, to supply

* Principium jure tribuetur homini, cujus causâ videtur cuncta alia genuisse natura. *Plin. N. Hist. l. 7. in præmio.*

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ply himself in such a way as he likes best, and ability to make a more ample use of all things than the rest of the creatures can; so that he has a power, of making almost every thing in nature minister to his necessity, convenience or delight. For how plentifully is he provided, both from the earth, the air and the sea, with great variety, for the support even of his animal life? Many of the creatures, which are much greater, and stronger, and swifter than he, yet own a plain submission to him; so that he can use them both to ease his own labour, and satisfy his necessity, and to furnish him with many kinds of pleasure and delight. Of this I might say much more, to shew what a convenient reference all this part of the creation has to man: by which I do not mean, that nothing has any other designed use, but what man makes of it: for it would be a diminution to the infinite wisdom of Providence, to suppose that we see all the uses to which every thing is designed; but that things are contrived, with as much wisdom and goodness towards man, and as aptly suited to him, as if he had been the creature principally designed to be taken care of: and nothing can hinder us from thinking so, but man's unworthiness of such infinite care and goodness towards him.

But

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But I intend not so much to consider Man, in respect of his Body and outward Condition, whereby he is related to the material world, as in respect of his Mind and Reason, by which he is made capable of judging about the rest of the Creation, and reflecting upon himself. And of this, together with the uses that ought to be made, both of this and the foregoing Considerations, I intend to speak farther in my next Discourse.



Q

SERMON



S E R M O N V I I I .

Preached *November* the 4th 1717.

Rom. i. 19, 20, 21.

*Because that which may be known of
God is manifest in them, for God
bath shewed it unto them:*

*For the invisible things of him, from the
creation of the world, are clearly
seen, being understood by the things
that are made, even his eternal Pow-
er and Godhead; so that they are
without excuse :*

Because that when they knew God, they

Q 2

glori-

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glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, &c.



IN my last Discourse upon this Subject, I propos'd to consider, that which I laid down as the *Third* ground of the universal belief of the Being of a God and a Providence, in all ages and nations, *viz.* The common principles of Reason deducing this persuasion, as a plain and necessary consequence or conclusion, from the observation of those visible effects of Power, Wisdom and Goodness, in the frame of the world, which are obvious to every considerate man. For though this, as I then observed, be not the thing, from which the generality of mankind draw their first notions of a Deity, yet it is certainly that, by which, when they come to the more free and extensive use of their reason, those notions are both most evidently confirmed, and most usefully improved, in them. For which reason, the Apostle, here in the Text, seems chiefly to point at this as an unexceptionable ground of Religion, common to all men; being what even the Gentile philosophers themselves, who seriously enquired into the nature of things, had frequently insisted on as good evidence; and

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and therefore could not reasonably refuse, to admit the just and necessary consequences which might be drawn from it.

Some manifest instances of an incomprehensible Power, Wisdom and Goodness, exerting it self in all the works of nature, I have already touched upon, though but briefly; because, considering the immense variety of the subject, which has been more copiously handled by others, both ancients and moderns, my designed method would allow me, only to point at such apparent tokens of an Almighty, Intelligent, and Beneficent Being, presiding over all things, as no man of common understanding, with any tolerable degree of diligence or observation, can easily avoid taking notice of: Such as the amazing magnitude of the whole Creation; the prodigious number and variety of Creatures contained in this immense space; the exquisite minuteness of the several parts, of which each distinct creature, either animate or inanimate, is composed; the beauty, order and regularity of every distinct species of things; the harmonious correspondence of each part of nature to other; and more particularly, the curious structure of so many different species of animals; the exquisite formation of their parts, and the nice adapting

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of them to their several uses; so that there is nothing either of superfluity or defect, but every thing properly tending to the preservation, continuance and propagation of the several kinds, through all generations; with a suitable provision for all their natural wants and desires, so that they can and do all rejoice in their beings; which shews a goodness answerable to the power and wisdom of the Author of their being. I was in the last place, considering Man, the principal inhabitant of this lower part of the world, with whom we have the best opportunity of being most intimately acquainted; and in whom, if we were to consider only the visible relation which he stands in to this material world about him, we might see an infinite wisdom and goodness continually taking care of him: So that, notwithstanding the ancient objection of the *Epicureans* and others, that he is neither fed, nor clothed, nor armed, by nature, in the same ready manner that some other creatures are; yet he has abundantly more, and better use of all these conveniences, than those very creatures which are born with them; and by virtue of his natural reason and superiority over the other creatures, can easily supply himself, by their means, with whatever he

wants,

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wants, in great abundance. Is not the labour of building, and sowing, and planting, and all other manual operations, in which we are also greatly served, and much of our pains eased, by the other creatures, abundantly recompensed by a more commodious way of dwelling, and a more plentiful variety of food and clothing, procured for us, in a way suitable to our superiority over those creatures; and by the exercise of those powers, in which by nature we do excel them. So that what complaints soever, some rash and unthinking men may make, of the disadvantages mankind ly under, compared with other creatures, yet, I believe, no man in his wits would deliberately change his condition with any of those brutes, whose happiness he would sometimes be thought so much to envy. A man that seriously and impartially considers this matter, would wonder to find, that so stupid, as well as ungrateful a complaint, could ever proceed from men, in other respects of good discernment, such as *Pliny* and some others. I mention *Pliny* particularly, because (both by his works, and by the account which his nephew gives of him, *lib. 3. epist. 5.*) he appears to have been a man very studious, and of great industry, and not much addicted to any mere sensual pleasure;

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sure; and by consequence, one who might have known how to distinguish better, between the value of those rational entertainments, which are by nature so eminently provided for man above other creatures, and those conveniences of mere animal life; which though brutes have without their own care, yet every man may have, in more abundance, by the exercise of such a care, as is rather pleasant than uneasy to his reason; which makes such a complaint the more unaccountable in him, if it were not, that where men quit the sense of Providence, their reason also often forsakes them. But as for those who are so far sunk into brutality, that they have no notion of any human happiness, but what consists, either in the mere gratification of their outward senses, or a perfect inactivity; such a complaint from them is, I confess, the less to be wondered at. A perfect *idleness* seems to be the darling principle of the *Epicureans*, upon which they deny all providence, because, according to them, no being can be happy that has any thing to do^a. But as *Tully*, in the person of *Cotta*, justly observes,

^a Nisi quietum nihil beatum— And, Nos autem beatam vitam in animi securitate & in omnium vacatione numerum

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serves, *such kind of argument, not only destroys the activity of the Divine nature, but is the ready way to make men idle, and good for nothing*^b. And unless it be upon this *Idle* principle, no man can justly complain, that nature has made better provision for other creatures than she has for man, even in respect of the mere animal life.

But my design was not so much to consider man, in respect of his bodily conveniences, and that outward condition, whereby he is related to the material world, as in respect of his mind and reason; whereby he is made capable of judging about the rest of the Creation, and of reflecting upon himself and his own actions, and considering what his own nature is in its best capacity, and whether there be any powers above him, to which he may be likewise related. However, by the way, it may not be improper to take notice of two or three observations, which arise from that Rank or order which man bears in the world, in respect of other creatures.

I. That

nerum ponimus. *Cic. de N. D. lib. 1. cap. 20. And again, cap. 36.* Profectò Epicurus, quasi pueri delicati, nihil cessatione melius existimat.

^b Hæc oratio non modò Deos spoliât motu & actione divinâ, sed etiam homines inertes efficit, si quidem agens aliquid, ne Deus quidem esse beatus potest. *ib. cap. 37.*

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I. That there is a manifest subordination of one thing to another, or different degrees of perfection in the several ranks of creatures one above another, till we come to mankind: from whence men have been taught, by the mere light of nature, to conclude, that there is something in man more excellent and valuable than in them, which gives him a natural dominion over them; and signifies, that they were made for his use, and designed to serve him. This is not merely a notion of the *Stoics*, though they insist much upon it, as may be seen from *Tully* and other writers; but is, before them, laid down by *Aristotle*^c, as an allowed principle, that *Plants were made for Animals, and the other Animals for the sake of Man, the tame ones both for use and food, the wild ones, if not all yet, at least the greatest part of them, for food and clothing, and other conveniences: and that therefore,*

if

^c Ἡ μὲν ἔν τοιαύτῃ κτῆσις ὑπ' αὐτῆς φαίνεται ὅτι φύσεως διδομένη πᾶσιν, ὥστε καὶ τὴν πρώτην γένεσιν εὐθὺς, ἔτω καὶ τελεωθεῖσι. — Ὡστε ὁμοίως δῆλον ὅτι καὶ γενομένοις οἰκτεῖον, τὰ τε φυτὰ τὴν ζωὴν ἕνεκεν εἶναι, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ζῶα τὴν ἀνθρώπων χάριν· τὰ μὲν ἡμερᾶς, καὶ διὰ τὴν χρῆσιν καὶ διὰ τὴν τροφὴν· τὰ δ' ἀγρίων, εἰ μὴ πάντα, ἀλλὰ τά γε πλεῖστα τὴν τροφῆς καὶ ἄλλης βοηθείας ἕνεκεν, ἵνα καὶ ἐσθῆς καὶ ἄλλα ὄρεσθαι γίνῃ) ἐξ αὐτῶν. εἰ ἔν ἡ φύτις μηδὲν μῆτε ἀτελὲς ποιεῖ μῆτε μάτῳ, ἀναγκαῖον τὴν ἀνθρώπων ἕνεκεν αὐτὰ πάντα πεποιηκέναι τὴν φύσιν. *Aristot. Polit. lib. I. cap. 8.*

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if nature makes nothing imperfect, [or without an end] nor in vain, then she must have made all these things for men.

2. It is observed, that there is something in the very outward structure of man, which very remarkably distinguishes him from the other creatures below him; and which, in the apprehension of some persons of great judgment and penetration, denotes his being chiefly designed for the exercise of his reason and understanding; towards which, his erect posture of Body gives him a particular advantage. Upon which account, *Aristotle himself* takes notice, that ^d *of all animals, man alone is of an upright posture, because his nature and essence is divine: and the work or business of that which is most divine, is understanding and thinking; but this work could not be so easily performed, if there were a great bulk of body placed above (or incumbent upon) the seat of reason and thinking, for weight makes the mind, and the common seat of sense or perception, to be hardly moved,*

^d Ὁρθὸν μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶ μόνον τὸ ζῶον. Ἀλλὰ τὸ τὴ φύσιν αὐτῆς καὶ τὴ ἁγίαν εἶναι Θεῶν. Ἔργον δὲ τῆ θεοτάτης τὸ νοεῖν καὶ θεωρεῖν. τὰ το δ' ἔρῳδιον πολλὰ τῶ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐπιχειρῶν σώματι. τὸ γὰρ βάρος δυσκίνητον ποιεῖ τὴ ἀλγούσαν καὶ τὴ κοινῶ ἀποδῆσιν. *Aristot. de partib. Animal. l. 4. cap. 10.*

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ed, or to perform its functions with greater difficulty. I will not be answerable for the exact Philosophy of this reason of *Aristotle's*; but however, it shews his opinion, that the soul of man, or that part of him which reasons, and understands, and thinks, is not mere body or matter, but something which moves and actuates the body to such a degree, and which is therefore of more value than the body, because for the use and convenience of it the body it self was made of such a particular figure and situation of parts. Divers others of the ancients, (as *e Balbus* the *Stoic* in *Tully* expresses their sense) think the figure of the body thus designed, that by a more commodious viewing the Heavens, men might more readily attain to the knowledge of God; because men were not made merely to dwell upon the earth, but from thence to be spectators of things above and in the Heavens, a sight which

e — Qui (Deus) primum eos humo excitatos, celsos & rectos constituit, ut Deorum cognitionem, cælum intuentes, capere possent. Sunt enim è terrâ homines non ut incolæ atque habitatores, sed quasi spectatores superarum rerum atque cælestium, quarum spectaculum ad nullum aliud genus animantium pertinet. *Cic. de N. D. lib. 2. cap. 56.*

Pronaque cum spectant animalia cætera terram,
Os homini sublime dedit cælumque tueri,
Jussit & erectos ad sidera tollere vultus, &c.

Ovid.

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which no other kind of animals is concerned withal. Indeed, as to this reason, it must be owned, that if the mere ability to view the Heavens, by the natural situation of the eye, were all that is intended, there could not be much inferred from it, to the advantage of man above all other creatures, because there are many of them, whose eyes are made as much, or more, to look upward, as those of man. But the position of the eye in the head is not the only thing to be considered, but the natural elevation of the head, above all the rest of the Body, whereby this ability to look upwards at pleasure, as well as any other way, is render'd more advantagious to man than to any other creature. This is that which makes the argument good, and in this general sense I presume their expressions ought to be taken. And therefore *Socrates* in *Xenophon*,^f very justly, as well as religiously, makes it an instance of the care of Providence, that, among many other advantages, *it hath given man this erect posture, to enable him*

^f Ἐπειτ' ἐκ ὁμοίᾳ (Θεὸς ἀνθρώπων) φροντίζειν, οἱ πρῶτον μὲν μόνοι τῶν ζώων ἄνθρωπον ὀρθὸν ἀνέστησαν, ἢ δ' ὀρθότης καὶ παρορᾶν πλεῖον ποιεῖ διώαζ', καὶ τὰ ὑπερθεῖν μάλλον θεῶν, καὶ ἥττον κακοπαθεῖν. *Xenoph. ἀπομνημ. lib. I. cap. 4. §. 11.*

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him to see further before him, and better to view the things above, and to be less subject to injury: To which we may add, that it enables him to use his *hands* to many excellent purposes, both of animal and rational life, which he could not do if he had only *feet* instead of them.

3. It may be farther observed, that, of all visible creatures, mankind alone has the benefit of Speech, or the power of communicating his thoughts by articulate sounds, framed and modelled according to his own discretion. Other creatures have tongues, which serve them for the same animal uses that the tongue of man serves him for^s. But this use of the tongue they have not, nor any other ability of making significant sounds, except only in so low a degree as merely to signify some pressing natural appetite, or present passion of joy or grief, resulting from immediate sensation of pleasure or pain. But in man, the Tongue and other organs of speech, besides their other uses in animal life, are evidently designed for the communication of reason and
thought

^s Καὶ μὴ γλῶττιν γε πάντων τῶ ζώων ἔχόντων, μῖνον τῇ τῇ ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησαν (οἱ Θεοὶ) οἷαν ἄλλοτε ἀλλαχῇ ψάυσαν τῷ σώματι ἀρεθρὲν τε τῇ φωνῇ καὶ σημαίνειν πάντα ἀλλήλοις ἃ ἐβλόμεθα.
Xenoph. ib. §. 12.

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thought from one man to another, and so have a plain reference to an higher principle within, which is entirely distinct from mere animal life.

From these observations, and divers others of like sort, which might be added if it were necessary, which are frequently to be met with even in *Heathen* writers, I think we may very fairly draw this conclusion, That the same wisdom, power and goodness, which is so manifest in the visible world, does likewise extend itself to things invisible; or that our Souls or minds, and whatever other superior Beings there may be, are not less the production of some wise, and good, and powerful Being, than our bodies and the bodies of other animals, or the things of an inferior degree. For since there is in nature a manifest and regular subordination of one thing to another, or a gradual progression from things perfectly inanimate to things that have vegetative life, and from thence to animals of different degrees of excellence, and from them to man; and since there is in man an evident relation of his outward or bodily fabrick, to the use of something in him which reasons, and reflects and uses the body, to many purposes, as its instrument, and shews its own
Being

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Being by performing visible effects upon the body, though itself be invisible ; and since all these several ranks of things tend upwards, and each of them, as it were, point at something above them, to which they own a subjection, at least in point of excellence ; it is but reasonable from thence to suppose, that man, which is of this compound nature, made up of something visible and something invisible, is, in respect of his Mind and Reason, as much related to something above him, as he is, in respect of his Body, related to the creatures below him. And consequently, whatever Being is the fountain or original of all that power, wisdom and goodness which we admire in the world, it is a Being much more resembling the Soul or thinking part, than the body or passive part of Man. All material things manifestly disclaim any intelligence or thought of their own. They are acted indeed and moved in a wise and regular manner, by design and to some purpose, but they do not act or move themselves. Man has a power of acting or moving himself and other things about him, to a certain degree, and he perceives or is conscious that he has it. But yet withal he is conscious, that he himself did not exist from eternity, and so could
not

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not always have this power: And therefore he perceives, that he depends upon some other cause for his Being, which did exist before him. And thus whatever perfections or powers there are in the mind of man; they were made or caused by a Being yet more perfect, because antecedent to man and capable of communicating such powers and perfections as are in man, which man by experience knows in himself he cannot communicate to any other being. And from hence by necessary reasoning we may conclude, that the first cause of all perfection must necessarily be Eternal or Self-existent, that is, it neither had nor possibly could have any superior or antecedent cause of its being.

But since this Self-existent Being is (as I said before) much more resembled by the soul or invisible part of man; than by any thing outward or sensible; its attributes or perfections will be more fully represented; and better understood; by being compared with the correspondent powers or perfections in the mind of man. Let us therefore briefly consider the human Mind or soul, with respect to those attributes of Power, wisdom and goodness, the perfection of which we attribute to the Supreme Being. And we shall find in man not

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mercy

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merely the effects of them, such as are discernible in all the parts of Nature, as I have before shewn, but likewise some image or resemblance of the attributes themselves, or a capacity in the mind of man to exercise them in a limited degree. Thus for instance, The Mind or Soul of man has a power of actuating the body, though not seen or felt in it; of moving or not moving all or any part of it at pleasure; of determining its motion this way or that way, without being first moved or impelled by any outward force, that is, a power of beginning motion of itself, which is indeed a true and real power, and such as matter is not capable of; a power of willing, chusing or acting freely, or without being acted upon by any external agent. I know, that those men who are unwilling to allow the Being of any God, but the Universe, or any spiritual substance, or any thing distinct from matter and motion, do likewise of consequence deny this power of beginning motion, or what in other words is called *Freewill*, to be in man; because they say there is always some cause or other, which antecedently determines him to chuse and act this way or that way: And by this they think a man is as necessarily moved to act, as a Clock to strike,

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Strike; though it may be by a longer chain of causes, one depending upon another, so that the impulsive cause cannot be so immediately seen. But here in this way of reasoning they always either beg the question, that is, would first have us take it for granted, that there is no other Being in the world but matter differently modified, which never acts but as it is acted upon, or else they confound a *Moral* motive, or rational ground of a man's acting, with a *Physical* efficient cause: So that an abstracted reason inducing, and a bodily impulse forcing us to this or that, are with them taken for the same thing, though they are things as entirely distinct as sound and colour; and one would think, that, as Dr. Barrow expresses it, *No man is surely so dull, that he cannot perceive a huge difference between being dragged by a violent hand, and drawn to action by a strong reason; although it may puzzle him to express that difference.* I might add a great deal more concerning this self-moving, or self-determining power in the mind of man, which yet perhaps would be better understood by a man's carefully consulting the operations of his own mind. But this matter has of late been set in so clear a

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light, by an excellent person,^h that I think there is no occasion at present for enlarging upon it.

2. As to Wisdom in the mind of man, we may observe several excellent instances. I need not mention sensation or perception, which are but the first necessary inlets to knowledge, or rudiments of it, caused by the intervention of our outward senses, and which perhaps are not peculiar to man. But we may take notice of such abilities as these which follow; Its power of reflecting upon itself and its own idea's, as well as upon things without itself; its comparing, reasoning and judging of things past, present and future; its considering and suiting ends to means, and acting always with some design or view of good, real or apparent: The power of inventing and contriving, improving and perfecting many noble arts and sciences, by considering the nature of several causes and their effects, and the dependencies of one thing upon another; the quickness of its thought and its power of representing to itself, in an instant, things at the greatest distance, as if they were present, without the trouble of local

^h See Dr. Clarke's *Letters to Mr. Leibnitz*.

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cal motion; the power of forming to itself abstracted notions of things, and as it were creating subjects of thought, which have no other actual existence but in itself, and judging of their agreement or disagreement with one another, and thereby of producing many useful truths. These and many others are the properties of an Human Mind, which shew it to be an intelligent being of a nature quite different from that of matter, however modified; which made some of the most sagacious *Heathen* Philosophers ⁱ judge it to be *Divine*, or of the same Nature with God himself, and therefore Eternal also.

3. As to Goodness, though it must be confess'd, that the traces of it are not always so visible, as we could wish; the true reason of which failure is best learn'd from Divine Revelation, yet there are not wanting such marks even of that, where ill custom, and ill example, and want of due culture hath nor

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quite

ⁱ Itaque quicquid est illud, quod sentit, quod sapit, quod vult, quod viget, cæleste & divinum est, ob eamque rem æternum sit necesse est. Nec verò Deus ipse, qui intelligitur à nobis, alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens soluta quædam & libera, segregata ab omni concretionem mortali, omnia sentiens & movens, ipsaque prædita motu sempiterno, *Cic. Tusc. lib. 1. cap. 27.*

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quite destroyed them, as shew, that it does originally belong to the mind of man; so that a man must be monstrously depraved indeed, that has lost all sense of doing good. There are hardly any so bad as not inwardly to approve of the exercise of Justice, Benignity, Gratitude and Sincerity, and to abhor all acts of Injustice, Cruelty, Ingratitude and Baseness. We should not call the generous propension of doing kindness to others by the name of *Humanity*, if such an inclination did not originally belong to *Human Nature*; nor could all men be so generally prone to distaste and think amiss of all effects of pure selfishness in others, if a friendly or *social* principle were not natural. And here I cannot but observe, that most of those pretenders to Philosophy, whether ancient or modern, who have excluded a wise and good Providence out of their scheme, have also given the worst character that can be of human nature, making mere self-enjoyment and Fear the only principles of human virtue.
^k That *Epicurus* and his followers made the
chief

^k — Quippe qui (*Epicurus*) testificetur ne intelligere quidem se posse ubi sit, aut quid sit ullum bonum, præter illud, quod

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chief good or ultimate end of human happiness to consist in Pleasure, and that pleasure to arise, either from mere bodily sensations, or from reflection upon such sensations, is well known to all that are acquainted with the writings of the Ancients. And that this opinion reduces Man very near to the level of a brute, is evident at the first sight to any one that considers it: and the maintainers of it are not much concerned to deny this consequence. [But they that would see this opinion and its consequences examined and confuted at large, may find their satisfaction in *Tully's* second book *de Finibus*, where the matter is set in a very clear light.] And as for that other principle of the same Sect, that ¹ *All kindness and good-will arises from weakness*, it has of later days been copied, by those who make the natural state of man a state of war (in which every man is an enemy to all others) and all peaceable and kind offices the

R 4

effect

quod cibo aut potione & aurium delectatione, & obscœna voluptate capiatur. *Cic. de Finib. l. 2. cap. 3.*

—Est autem à te semper dictum, nec gaudere quemquam nisi propter corpus, nec dolere. *ib. cap. 30.* Negas animi ullum esse gaudium quod non referatur ad corpus, *ib.*

¹ ——— Omnis in imbecillitate est & gratia & caritas. *De Nat. Deor. l. 1. cap. ult.*

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effect only of fear, arising from a sense of our own weakness and inability to subdue all others. But though this may indeed be a representation of these men's own corrupted temper; yet if it were not a very false account of Human nature in general, the world would be in a much worse condition than it is. For, thanks to the Author of our nature, there are in these very men some such natural propensions to society as overthrow their assumed principle, and shew, that man is naturally a *social animal*. Upon which account, besides the consideration of the fore-mentioned excellencies, in the mind of man, singly taken, by which in some sort he resembles the Supreme Being, we may also observe, how the joint exercise of them produces many noble and beneficial effects in the world, in some kind resembling those of Providence, though in degree infinitely below them. From hence come all those conveniencies of human life, the procuring and improving of which makes so great a part of the business of men, both in their private and social state; such as building, planting, tilling, inventing new and useful arts of all kinds, exercising Trade and Commerce, forming designs, and making laws and rules for their more happy

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py living in society, seeking out means of making their communication and intercourse with others more extensive, and exercising a sort of care and providence, not only over their own Species, but even over many of the Brute creatures also. Now from whence is it, but from an original sense of Goodness in the mind of man, that men direct their natural portion of Wisdom and Power to such beneficial purposes? and that their own consciences reproach them, for every wilful deviation from what appears to be just and right; that is, for every deliberate action which is greatly contrary to, or inconsistent with, the natural good of mankind, though it may for the present gratify their mere animal passions or sensations? Corporeal impressions alone could never produce such sentiments of remorse for acting contrary to reason, or of satisfaction for acting according to it; but would very often produce the contrary, if not controlled by superior Thought and Consideration, which is able to correct the present impulses of matter upon us: So that reason and thought is of a nature very distinct from that of Matter and Motion, and superiour to it.

To this purpose I might farther observe divers other properties in the mind of man; which,

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which, though they are not so much images of the divine perfections of a supreme Being, as endeavours of attaining something like them; yet they do tacitly imply our natural apprehensions of such a supreme Being, to whom such perfections do necessarily belong. Of kind, for instance, is, The perpetually growing desire of knowledge, and that of all kinds, as far as possible. *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing*; nor does the mind, which is exercised in the search of Truth, ever think it has proceeded far enough, but is always striving to enlarge its views, and make new additions to its stock of knowledge. In like manner, its perpetual enquiry after Happiness, or Good, is without all bounds, and cannot be satisfied with any thing less than infinite. It is always aspiring after something higher and nobler, than what at present it enjoys. Whatever methods it takes to procure them, yet it is always, in its nature, tending towards some farther real or imaginary degrees of happiness. Thus also it is constantly aiming at, and as it were, reaching forward towards Immortality; and therefore naturally endeavouring some way or other to attain it. It finds in its nature an utter abhorrence of not being at all, so that it chuses an imaginary existence rather

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rather than none, endeavouring always, by some means or other, to survive this life, if it be but in fame, and the memory of others. This natural desire or instinct, even *Epicurus* himself could not but follow, though it were a contradiction to his own principles ^m, when by his Will, he appointed a day to be annually kept by his followers, in commemoration of himself and *Metrodorus*. This instinct is by *Tully* ⁿ more justly called, a *natural presage of a Future state*, with which he observes, all the greatest and best minds are most firmly possessed. Now the fore-mentioned powers or perfections, abilities or instincts, naturally in the mind of man, do indeed, to a considerate man, argue a close dependence upon a superior Being, in nature, infinitely above any sensible object, from whom these perfections are derived, and whose nature they do resemble. For seeing the same perfections exercised in the world in an infinite degree, which it self exercises in a smaller compass and
a lower

^m Of this see *Tully de Finibus, lib. 2. cap. 31.* And *Dio- genes Laërtius, in the life of Epicurus.*

ⁿ ——— *Inhæret in mentibus quasi seculorum quoddam augurium futurorum: idque in maximis ingeniis altissimisque animis & exsistit maximè & apparet facillimè. Tuscul. Diss. l. 1. c. 15.*

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a lower degree, how can it do otherwise than conclude, that there is an Infinite mind, to whom all these perfections originally belong? And thus is the Mind of man naturally led to the acknowledgment of a God, from reflecting upon it self.

I know not how far such considerations as these, may move those men who think of nothing but matter and motion; and are resolved to fetch the principles of all things from thence. But I am persuaded, that if men would seriously consider things as they are, without resolving first from whence they will have them come, they would more easily see from what cause or principle they do really come; and would not ascribe effects, in which such wonderful Wisdom, Power and Goodness, do manifestly appear, to causes so infinitely below the effects themselves.

Now the result of what I have said, both in this and my former Discourse, upon this third Ground of universal persuasion of the Being of God, is this. The manifest instances of inconceivable Wisdom, Power and Goodness, constantly displayed in the frame and preservation of the world; and, in some measure, as it were, exemplified in the Mind of man, could not proceed, either from chance or necessity;

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cessity; that is, from any casual concurrence of the minute parts of matter impelling one another, without any directing cause; and therefore must argue an Intelligent Being, superior to all these effects, to whom all these perfecti-
ons do originally belong.

That considerate and thinking men did thus, by reason and arguing from effects to a First cause, establish their belief of the Being of a God and a Providence, (the existence whereof they had perhaps generally been something acquainted withal, by tradition, before they begun to reason about it) is a matter of fact, to which the writings of all ages give testimony. And that their Argument was true and concluding cannot be denied, but by supposing something, that implies some manifest absurdity or contradiction; such as, that things may be without any sufficient causes of their being. Indeed to keep this absurdity from appearing, men who deny Providence would fain make use of the word *°Nature*, as a sufficient solution for every thing.
P But this is a word of a very ambiguous and indeterminate signification, till we first know
what

° See Velleius in Tully, *de Nat. D. lib. 1. cap. 20.*

P See Tully *de Nat. D. lib. 2. cap. 32.*

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what principle he goes upon that uses it. For it has one meaning with an *Epicurean*, and another with a *Stoic*, and another in another Sect of Philosophy. *Plato*⁹ observes, that some Pretenders to Philosophy in his time, introduced Atheistical opinions, by making *Nature* and *Chance*, antecedent and superior to *Art* and *Design*, supposing that both the *four Elements* or *Matter*, and the *Form* of the *Universe*, the *Heavenly Bodies*, *Plants* and *Animals*, and all other things, were made only by a Fortuitous mixture of contrary Qualities^r; that they were not the Effect of any *INTELLIGENT MIND* or *GOD*; or of *ART* and *DESIGN*, but of *NATURE* and *CHANCE*; but that *ART* and *DESIGN* arose out of them afterwards. And where he proceeds to discourse farther of this opi-

⁹ Vide Platonem de Repub. l. x. pag. 889.

^r Εοικε (φασι) τὰ μὲν μέγιστα αὐτῶν καὶ κάλλιστα ἀπεργάζεσθαι φύσιν καὶ τύχην, τὰ δὲ σμικρότερα τέχνην, &c.

^r Καὶ πάντα ὅποσα τῇ ἑναντίων κράσει καὶ τύχῃ ἐξ ἀνάγκης συνεκείρασθαι, ταύτη καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔγωγε γεννηκέναι τὸ τε ἔρανον ὅλον καὶ πάντα ὅποσα κατ' ἔρανον· καὶ ζῶα αὖ καὶ θύττα ἐύμπαντα, ὥρων πασῶν ἐν τέττων γλυκομήνῃ· ἔτι δὲ νῦν (φατὶν) εἰδὲ τίνα Θεόν, εἰδὲ τίνα τέχνην· ἀλλὰ, ὃ λέγομεν, φύσει καὶ τύχῃ· τέχνην δὲ ὕστερον ἐν τέττων ὑτέρῃ γλυκομήνῃ, αὐτῇ, θνητῇ ἐν θνητῶν, &c. ib.

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opinion, he says, that ^s *whoever affirms this, must suppose, that Fire, and Water, and Earth, and Air, were the first of all Beings, and must call these by the Name of NATURE, and say that SOUL (or the principle of Life and Thought) arose from them, and was subsequent to them.* And then going on to confute this Opinion, by shewing, that the operations of *Mind, Thinking, Understanding, Willing, &c.* are antecedent to being *Hard or Soft, Light or Heavy*, and the like properties of matter: He observes, that ^t *they make a wrong use of the word NATURE, who apply it to the first Original production of things, when they put MATTER or BODY in the first place. But that if they would allow SOUL or MIND to be older than MATTER or BODY, they might then be allowed to say, that such things are so or so by Nature, but otherwise it is wrong to say so.*

Thus,

^s Κινδυνεύει γὰρ ὁ λεγὼν ταῦτα, πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γῆ καὶ ἀέρα, πρῶτα ἡγεῖσθαι τῶν πάντων εἶναι, καὶ τὴν φύσιν ὀνομάζειν ταῦτα αὐτά, ψυχὴν δὲ ἐν τέττατον ὕστερον. pag. 891.

^t Οὐκ ὀρθῶς φέσιν ἑσθλον δὲ λέγειν φέσιν τὴν αὐτὴν τὰ πρῶτα· (τὰ δὲ σώματα τίθεσσι τὰ πρῶτα) εἰ δὲ φανήσκει ψυχὴ πρῶτον, καὶ πῦρ καὶ δὲ αἶρ, ψυχὴ δὲ ἐν πρῶτοις γενεαλογίᾳ, καὶ δὲ ὀρθότατα λέγοιτ' ἂν εἶναι ἀναφερόντως, ὅτι φύσει ταῦτ' ἔσθ' ἕως ἔχοντα· ἂν ψυχὴ τις ἐπιδήξῃ περὶ τοῦτέστιν εἶναι σώματι, ἄλλως δὲ ὀρθῶς. ib. pag. 892.

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Thus, when an intelligent and active Providence, antecedent and superior to matter and motion, is excluded, *Nature* can signify nothing but the state in which things are, without any consideration of what causes them to be; so that it is only the name of a train of Effects following one another; and not of any real Agent. And to this sense all the Atheistical Hypotheses of *Nature*, will at last be reduced. Sometimes by *Nature*, is meant an active principle, and then it either signifies the supreme Being, and first Cause of all things, described by another name, intimating, not only his power, but his method of acting; or else it signifies an inferior Agent, made by the Supreme, to actuate the world under him in a stated method; Which is what some understand by the *Anima mundi*. And in either of these senses, it implies, either immediately or ultimately, a wise and intelligent Providence ordering all things. But when any thing else is meant by it, 'tis only puzzling the Cause to ascribe any real power to it.

Now setting aside the use of this ambiguous word, from which men are apt to confound causes and effects without distinction; they who deny a free, active, wise and good Providence governing the world, as the first Cause
of

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of all these effects of which we have been speaking, must, in the conclusion, be reduced to assert; either, that there is really no such thing, as wisdom, power or goodness in the world; or that what we esteem such, is the mere, casual or necessary result of matter and motion; or else, that all things were from eternity, in the very way they now are: The Absurdity of all which will be very briefly shewn, in my next Discourse; when I shall likewise consider the Inference, which the Apostle here makes, from mens having such natural means of knowing God; which is; *That they are without excuse, because that when they knew God, or had sufficient means of knowing him, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.*

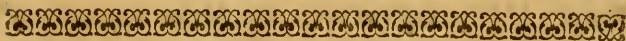
Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, be ascribed all Power, and Glory, and Honour, for evermore. Amen.





SERMON IX.

Preached *January* the 6th 17¹⁷₁₈.



Rom. i. --20, 21--

-----*So that they are without excuse:
Because that when they knew God, they
glorified him not as God, neither
were thankful, &c.*



IN these Words, and in the two Verses going before, which have been the Subject of some of my former Discourses, the Apostle asserts two things.

S 2

1. *That*

I. *That God has, from the beginning of the world, given sufficient manifestation of his own eternal Power and Godhead to mankind by his works, or by what he has plainly done, and still continues to do in the world.*

II. *That men having sufficient means of knowing God, if they still either disown or take no notice of his Being; if they neither glorify him as God, nor shew any gratitude towards him, they become thereby utterly inexcusable, and may justly expect to fall under his indignation for their neglect of him.*

The former of these I have already considered: in doing of which, I hope, I have given a reasonable account, of the ground or foundation of that universal persuasion of the Being of God, which has possessed mankind in all ages and nations: by which it appears, that the motives to believe it are such, as not only the unthinking vulgar, but men of the best understanding and capacity, have, upon diligent examination, owned to be sufficiently convincing; as they have from time to time testified in their writings. And

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to such as do acknowledge their conviction of the Being of God, upon the foregoing evidence, I might, without any farther trouble, apply my self, and desire them to consider the second assertion of the Apostle, in the words now before us, which are an inference from the former.

But because there are some men so perverse, as not to own themselves satisfied of the sufficiency of any Arguments drawn from visible effects, to prove a God or a Providence, till they see the utter impossibility that things should be, as they appear to be, any other way than by such Providence; therefore to prevent all cavilling at the conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing premisses, before I proceed to consider the consequence here intended to be spoke to, I shall, as I promised in the Close of my last Discourse, very briefly shew, That whoever considers the frame of the world, and of human nature in particular, and observes the Effects of Wisdom, Power and Goodness, of which we have been speaking in the foregoing Discourses, and yet denies a Free, Active, Wise and Good Providence, making and governing the world, to be the first cause of all these effects, must in the conclusion be reduced to assert something

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which implies a plain and manifest absurdity. For the result of all the reasonings of such men, upon this Subject, must, in the end, amount to one of these Assertions; Either,

1. That there is really no such thing as Wisdom, Power or Goodness in the world: Or,

2. That what we esteem the effect of such, is only the mere casual or necessary result of Matter and Motion: Or,

3. That all things were from eternity, succeeding one another necessarily in the way they now are.

'Tis true, that no Atheistical persons of common sense, will directly go about to maintain all these assertions; nor will they stick to any one of them, when they are hard pressed with the absurdity of it, but will presently retreat to another; as if their design were, by frequent changes of their ground, rather to offend religion, than to defend themselves: Whereas, to make their own principle secure, it ought on some side or other, to be defensible; which none of the foregoing assertions can be: For,

1. That there is really no such thing as Wisdom, Power or Goodness in the world;
and

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and that therefore, there can be no arguing at all from thence to prove a God or a Providence, seems at the first proposal a very absurd assertion; and perhaps few of them will now directly say it, in so many words: but by their earnestness to set aside all Final Causes, as having nothing to do in the making of the world, or any part of it, they shew a great inclination to close with it. For where there is no final cause, there is no antecedent intention, and where all intention is excluded, there is no intelligent acting, and consequently no exercise of wisdom or goodness, nor indeed of power, properly so called. And they are wont to admire the infidels of former days, who have certainly said as much as this assertion comes to. *Lucretius*, for instance, asserts, * that the eye was not made to see withal, nor the ear to hear withal, nor was any other

S 4

part

* Effugere illorumque errorem præmeditemur

Lumina qui faciunt oculorum clara creata

Prospicere ut possimus, &c. *lib. iv. 821.*

Nil ideo quoniam natum' est in copore ut uti

Possemus, sed, quod natum est, id procreat usum.

Nec fuit ante videre oculorum lumina nata.

——— Multoque creatæ sunt prius aures

Quam sonus est auditus: & omnia denique membra

Ante fuere, ut opinor, eorum quam foret usus.

Haud igitur potuere utendi crescere causa. *ib.*

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part of the body, designed originally for any of the uses to which we find it so very naturally, as we think, and constantly, applied; but that the use of these things was found out long after: and all this is built upon this notable reason, *because things must be before their uses*. Now if this reason have any weight in it, we may as well say, that no man could ever designedly contrive Clocks or Watches, to shew the hour of the day, because they could not shew it till they were made. I hope such men, who argue at this rate, will give us leave to say, that they cannot design any of their Arguments to prove any thing against the being of Providence, or, indeed, that they have any design at all in reasoning after this manner. For if there be any such thing as antecedent design or intention, to be proved from men's arguing or their acting, then there is in the world some Being which has intelligence, and acts with design, adapting means to ends foreseen, and laying premisses together, in order to infer a conclusion; that is, there is really Wisdom, Power and Goodness in the world: And if the effects of these appear, in a much higher and more evident degree, in the formation and use of things which we call natural, than in any of those

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those contrivances, which are the effects of human Art, then it is an absurdity not to think the efficient cause of them, in a much higher degree, intelligent than man is. And since man himself, with all his powers and perfections, could not make himself, but must proceed from a superior cause, that cause must have all the real perfections which man has, in an eminent degree, or else those perfections in man would be caused purely by nothing, which is a manifest contradiction. But

2. When they say, that what we account the effects of wisdom, power and goodness, or of an Intelligent Being, is only the mere casual or necessary result of Matter and motion, this will still be liable to the same absurdity in the end, that *something is caused by nothing*. For if there be any intelligent or understanding Being in the world, any Being endued with consciousness and perception, as man is allowed to be, such intelligence, perception and consciousness, must either be a perfection distinct from that of matter and motion, produced by a superior, active, intelligent Being, which is itself neither matter nor motion (and to allow this, is to own a God and a Spiritual Substance, which is all that we contend for in this argument;) Or it must be a composition

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tion of Unintelligent figure and motion; Or else it must be something caused by nothing. Now that any composition of unintelligent figure and motion, should be intelligence, thought, perception or consciousness, is altogether absurd: Because, whatever the composition of any material thing is, it is still in reality only that thing (or things) of which it is compounded. It is not altered in nature, but only in situation of parts: It may appear differently to our senses, but to our reason it is still the same, let the parts be never so mix'd or divided. A Globe cut into two Hemispheres, is not a jot nearer to Thought than it was before, because it is only the two parts of the same whole: nor can two equal Hemispheres put together have any other nature than what a Globe has: And the like may be said of all divisions or compositions of figure, or of matter and motion, how various soever. Therefore unless Figure be Thought, and all matter have sense, perception and consciousness (which is so absurd a supposition, that though some have advanced it, yet, I believe, few will maintain it) then no matter, as such, can have it or cause it. And then whatever has sense, perception and understanding, if it be not caused by a superior,

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rior, intelligent, immaterial Being, must be caused by nothing ; that is, there must be an effect without any cause at all, which is absurd.

^b *Tully* very often in his writings charges the *hypothesis* of *Epicurus* with this absurdity, of assigning a particular motion of *declination* to atoms, (which *Lucretius* calls *clinamen principiorum*,) in order to produce free-will, or a power of acting voluntarily, and yet not pretending to assign any cause of such declination, which, he says, is *the most absurd blunder that any philosopher can fall into*. And he makes this a fundamental fault in the philosophy ^d both of *Epicurus* and *Democritus*, that they considered only matter, and not the efficient cause, or power by which things are produced. And indeed whoever does this, will, in the end, be forced upon

^b *De Finibus Bon. & mal. l. i. cap. 6.* And in his Book I. *de Nat. Deor. cap. 25.* and in several places of his book *de Fato*.

^c Ait enim declinare atomum sine causâ, quo nihil turpius physico. *De finib. l. i. c. 6.*

^d Utriusque (*Democriti* sc. & *Epîcuri*) cum multa non probo, tum illud in primis, quòd cum in rerum naturâ duo quærenda sint, unum, quæ materia sit, ex qua quæque res efficiatur; alterum, quæ vis sit, quæ quidque efficiat; de materia differuerunt, vim & causam efficiendi reliquerunt. *ib.*

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upon the same absurdity that *Epicurus* was, or something very like it. And the removing it a degree further off, will not alter the case, unless it be to make the thing more absurd when we come at it. Just as *Epicurus* to avoid one difficulty, which *Democritus* it seems did not take care to fence against, run upon this solution, which, as *Tully* says, was much worse than owning the thing to be indefensible. And this has, in the event, been the case of all those schemes of Philosophy, which have pretended to make the world without an infinite intelligent Mind being concerned in it.

3. To suppose, that all things were from Eternity, succeeding one another necessarily, in the way they now are, without any Supreme Intelligent Power to dispose them, or give them motion, will also be equally absurd. That something must have existed from all eternity, cannot be denied by any one; for

^c *Epicurus* cum videret si atomi ferrentur in locum inferiorem suapte pondere nihil fore in nostrâ potestate, quod esset earum motus certus & necessarius; invenit quomodo necessitatem effugeret, quod videlicet *Democritum* fugerat. Ait atomum, cum pondere & gravitate directâ deorsus feratur, declinare paullulum. Hoc dicere turpius est quàm illud quod vult, non posse defendere, *De Nat. D. l. 25.*

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for else nothing could ever have existed. This must therefore either be some one self-existent, unchangeable, independent Being, from whom all other things originally receive their being; or else there must be an eternal succession of dependent changeable Beings, as this visible world comprehends, one producing another, without any original cause at all: that is, there must be an infinite series of effects, following one another, without any efficient cause: which is absurd.

Aristotle indeed is alledged as an assertor of the Eternity of the world: and being a man of a very piercing judgment, Atheists sometimes think themselves sufficiently defended under the patronage of his name. But if they would really consult his writings, they would find that his arguments afford their cause but very little defence. For whatever eternity he may ascribe to the material world, he is very far from doing it in their sense. He never thought, that matter could move itself, or could be the original cause of all things; but he makes ^f an *Eternal, Intelligent, Independent*

^f Ὅτι μὲν ἔστιν ὅσῃα τις αἰδίδου καὶ ἀκίνητου, καὶ κεχωρισμένη
 τῶν αἰδιδητῶν φανερόν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημύων. *Metaphys.* l. 12. cap. 7.
 Ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ πρῶτον τῶν ὄντων ἀκίνητον καὶ καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ

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dependent Mind to be the first cause or principle of all things, and that which gives motion to all things, being itself unmoveable and unchangeable: as may be seen at large both in his *Physicks* and *Metaphysicks*. And he every where makes *beauty* and *order* to be the effects of *Mind* and *Understanding*. And he commends *Anaxagoras* in many places, ⁸ for this principle, that *an intending mind was the cause of what is good and right; and the mover of matter, for some end and design*. And he is so far from thinking *final* or *intending* causes unphilosophical, that he exposes that Philosophy, as very ridiculous, which pretends to give an account of the formation of animals without

κτ' συμβεβηκός — κτ' τὸ κινεῖν αἰδίδιον κτ' πρότερον τῶ κινεῖν μῆξ, and much more to the same purpose, l. 12. cap. 8, 9, 10. where, after shewing that there cannot be a progression of causes in infinitum, without one original independent cause, he concludes with these words, Τὰ ὅντα εἰ βέλετ' πολιτεύεσθαι κακῶς, εἰ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίῃ, εἰς κοίραν. And in his *Physicks*, l. 8. cap. 6. he has these words, Ἐν γὰρ τοῖς φύσει, δεῖ τὸ πεπερασμένον κτ' τὸ βέλτιον, ἔαν ἐνδέχητ' ὑπάρχειν, ἰκανὸν ὅ καὶ εἶναι, ὃ πρῶτον τῶ ἀκινήτων αἰδίδιον ὃν ἔσαι πῶς ἄλλοις ἀρχὴ κινήσεως. Φανερόν ὅ καὶ ἐκ τῆδε ὅτι ἀνάγκη εἶναι τι ἐν κτ' αἰδίδιον τὸ πρῶτον κινεῖν, &c.

⁸ *Metaph.* l. 1. cap. 3. & lib. 12. cap. 10. Ἀναξαγόρας δὲ ὡς κινεῖν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀρχὴν, ὃ γὰρ νῆξ κινεῖ, ἀλλὰ κινεῖ ἕνεκά τινος.

Πολλαχῶς μὲν γὰρ τὸ αἴτιον εἶ καλῶς κτ' ἐρεθῶς τ' νῆξ λέγει. l. 1. de Anima. cap. 2.

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without them, and he says, that ^h *an ordinary carpenter would give a much better account of a piece of work, of which he was the maker, than such kind of Philosophers did, who went no farther than the mere mechanical motion of one part of matter upon another.* And he elſewhere ⁱ juſtly blames thoſe Philoſophers, who allowed nothing but matter, in the univerſe, for introducing motion without any active cauſe or principle to produce it; And likewise, becauſe ^k they were not able to give any account of what was *good and fit* (τῷ εὖ καλῶς) in the being or formation of things, from matter alone, or from

^h Πλὴν βέλτιον ὁ τέχων· ἔ γδ' ἱκανὸν ἔσαι αὐτῷ, τὸ τοῦτον εἶπεν ὅτι ἐμπροσθέν ὅς οὐ γάρ τις τὸ μὴ κοιλὸν ἐλθόντο τὸ ἢ ἐπίπεδον, ἀλλὰ διότι τ' πληγὴν ἐποίησατο τοιαύτην καὶ τίν' ἔνεκα, ἐξ αἰτίας, &c. *de Partib. Animalium. lib. I. cap. I.*

ⁱ Εἰ γδ' ὅτι μάλιστα πᾶσα φθορὰ καὶ γένεσις ἐκ τινος ὡς ἐνὸς ἢ πλειόνων ἐστὶ, ἀλλὰ τί τῷτο συμβαίνει καὶ τί τὸ αἴτιον, ἔ γδ' δὴ τό γε ὑποκείμενον αὐτὸ ποιεῖ μεταβάλλειν ἑαυτόν· λέγω δ' οἷον, ὅτε τὸ ξύλον ὅτε ὁ χαλκὸς αἴτιον ὅς μεταβάλλειν ἐκάτερον αὐτῶν· ὁ δὲ ποιεῖ τὸ μὴ ξύλον κλίην, ὁ ἢ χαλκὸς ἀνδριάντα, ἀλλ' ἑτέρον τι τ' μεταβολῆς ἴδιον· τὸ δὲ τῷτο ζητεῖν ἐστὶ τὸ τ' ἑτέραν ἀρχὴν ζητεῖν, ὡς ἂν ἡμεῖς φαίημεν, ὅθεν ἡ ἀρχὴ τ' κινήσεως. *Metaph. I. I. cap. 3.*

^k Τῷ γδ' εὖ καὶ καλῶς τὰ μὴ ἔχειν τὰ δὲ γίνεσθαι τ' ὅλων ἴσως ὅτε γῆν ἔτ' ἄλλο τ' τοιούτων ὅθεν ἔτ' εἰκὸς αἴτιον εἶναι ———— ὁ δ' αὐτῷ αὐτομάτῳ καὶ τύχῃ τοῦτον ἐπιτελεῖται πρᾶγμα καλῶς ἔχει. *ibid.*

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from chance and fortune. And ¹ those who make Body or matter the only substance, or universal nature, he condemns of great mistake, inasmuch as they consider only the first principles of body, but not of *things incorporeal, though there be things incorporeal*; And likewise, because, pretending to philosophize about the nature of all things, they take away (or leave out) the cause of motion. So that *Aristotle* was far from thinking an immaterial substance a contradiction, or that Matter could move itself, or think and act.

Thus I have endeavoured briefly to represent the absurdities which they must of necessity be driven to, who deny a Supreme, Intelligent, Eternal and Self-existent Being to be the original cause of all things, and the Author of all the *Beauty, Order and Harmony* of the world, and the fountain of all the Power, Wisdom and Goodness, which is manifest in the frame and preservation of it. And I might have drawn this matter out to
a much

¹ Ὅσοι μὲν ἔν ἐν τε τὸ πᾶν καὶ μίαν εἶναι φύσιν ὡς ὕλην τιθέασιν, καὶ ταύτῃ σωματικῶς καὶ μέσθῃ ἔχουσιν, ὁμολογῶντες ὅτι πολλαχῶς ἀμαρτάνουσιν. Τῶν γὰρ σωμάτων τὰ στοιχεῖα τιθέασιν μόνον, τὸ δὲ ἀσώματον ἔχοντων καὶ ἀσωμάτων. — καὶ περὶ πάντων φυσιολογεῖντες τὸ τὴν κινήσεως αἰτίαν ἀναιρεῖσιν. *Metaph. l. i. cap. 7.*

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a greater length in the abstracted or metaphysical way of reasoning, if my intended method would have allowed me to pursue that course. But because this has been fully done in that *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*; which was some years ago published by an excellent Author, as the substance of his Discourses upon this subject, I shall rather refer those that desire farther satisfaction in this way to that Treatise itself, where the arguments of Mr. *Hobbes* and *Spinoza*, and other Materialists; are fully answered, and the Self-existence of one Independent Infinite Being of all possible perfection demonstratively proved.

I proceed therefore now to what is asserted in the words of the text, as an inference from the foregoing doctrine, *viz. That men having sufficient means of knowing God (i. e. plain and evident reason to convince them; that there is such a Being) if notwithstanding this, they either disown, or take no notice of his Being, if they neither glorify him as God, nor shew any gratitude towards him, they become thereby utterly inexcusable, and will therefore certainly fall under his just indignation for their neglect of him.* This is what the Apostle affirms even of the Hea-

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then world, *That they are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.*

This consequence is what those men would fain avoid, who are inclined to Atheism, but yet are not hardy enough absolutely to deny those demonstrations which are brought for the Being of a God, when they are press'd with them. They have understanding enough to see the absurdity of attempting to prove it impossible, that there should be such a Being, as we call God. And therefore they are willing to wave that point, and to compromise the matter would content themselves to let it rest as a speculative point, of which much may be said on both sides; though they are pleased when they can find out objections against any particular method of proving it. But then they take it ill that we should offer to persuade them, that they are under any obligation themselves actually to own the belief of such a Being, or to tell them that they can be under any penalty from him for not believing, or not attending to the consequences of such belief. Why should we not be contented to let them alone to their own uncertainty, and, with *Protagoras*, to declare
freely,

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freely, that they have nothing to say, whether there be any God or no? Nay farther, they would persuade us, that it is inconsistent with that original notion or idea of Goodness which we must presuppose in God, if there is any such Being, to make any Man suffer for denying, or not believing his Being. A certain Author, who in his writings seems much more concerned for an elegant turn, and, as he fancies, a polite manner of writing, than for any real consistency of thought, justness of sentiment, or strict consequence of reason express'd in it, has in a very artificial manner dress'd up a plea, in behalf of those who call themselves *Free-thinkers*; which he proposes as a security against all superstition, ^m " To remember that there
 " is nothing in *God*, but what is *Godlike*;
 " that he is either not at all, or truly and perfectly good. But that when we are afraid
 " to use our reason freely, even on that very
 " question, Whether *he really be or not*; we
 " then actually presume him bad, and flatly
 " contradict that pretended Character of goodness and greatness, whilst we discover this
 " mistrust of his temper, and fear his anger

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" and

^m *Characteristicks*, Vol. I. p. 33, 34, 35.

“ and resentment, in the case of this freedom
“ of inquiry.——” And again, “ What
“ merit can there be in believing God or his
“ Providence upon frivolous and weak
“ grounds ? What virtue in assuming an opi-
“ nion contrary to the appearance of things,
“ and resolving to hear nothing that may be
“ said against it ? Excellent Character of the
“ God of Truth ! that he should be offended
“ at us, for having refused to put the lye up-
“ on our understandings, as much as in us lay,
“ and be satisfied with us, for having be-
“ lieved at a venture, and against our reason,
“ what might have been the greatest falshood
“ in the world, for any thing we could bring
“ as a proof or evidence to the contrary.”
And again he tells us, “ A man must have
“ surely an unhappy opinion of God, and
“ believe him not so good by far as he knows
“ himself to be, if he imagines, that an im-
“ partial use of his reason, in any matter of
“ Speculation whatsoever, can make him run
“ any risque hereafter : and that a mean de-
“ nial of his Reason, and an affectation of
“ belief, in any point too hard for his under-
“ standing, can entitle him to any favour in
“ another world. This is being Sycophants
“ in Religion, mere Parasites of Devotion.

Now

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Now though this Author has in some passages of his writings very fine strokes in defence of a Supreme Governing Mind, which, if pursued, do not seem very consistent with what he here insinuates; and has indeed in this place been so cautious, as not directly to assert, that the downright open profession of Atheism cannot be any way displeasing to God Almighty, or incur any just resentment from him; yet if we consider the drift of thisⁿ whole Treatise, and how kindly in other places he takes all those men into his protection, the falseness of whose Philosophy he could not but discern, who have no other title to that *Free-thinking*, which he would encourage, but their liberal charging all Religion with Imposture or Credulity; and how much he puts all kind of Revelation, real and pretended, upon the same bottom; and if we consider farther, how those men, who have treated all Religion in grosser language, have cited this Author with great approbation, as a patron of their opinions, we may, I think, without any injustice, say, That this way of reasoning does really, in their judgment, imply so much. And especially when the sup-

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posed

ⁿ *Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour, p. 95*

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posed character of the *Divine Being* is, in the conclusion, intended to be drawn under the following resemblance of a Prince or Minister of state, in these words, “ ’Tis natural
 “ (says he °) for us to wish our merit should
 “ be known ; particularly, if it be our fortune to have served a nation as a good Minister ; or as some Prince or Father of a
 “ country, to have render’d happy a considerable part of mankind under our care.
 “ But if it happen’d, that of this number there
 “ should be some so ignorantly bred, and of
 “ so remote a province, as to have lain out
 “ of the hearing of our name and actions ;
 “ or hearing of ’em, should be so puzzled
 “ with odd and contrary stories told up and
 “ down concerning us, that they know not
 “ what to think, whether there were really
 “ in the world any such person as our self :
 “ should we not in good truth be ridiculous
 “ to take offence at this ? And should we not
 “ pass for extravagantly morose and ill-humour’d, if instead of treating the matter in
 “ raillery, we should think in earnest of *re-*
 “ *venging our selves* on the offending parties,
 “ who, out of their rustick ignorance, ill
 “ judgment

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“ judgment or incredulity, had detracted from
 “ our renown ? ” These words, one would
 think, do not want a comment to let us into
 their meaning, or designed application ; or if
 they did, those which follow will sufficiently
 clear it. For thus he goes on ; ^P “ How shall
 “ we say then ? Does it really deserve praise
 “ to be thus concerned about it ? Is the doing
 “ good for Glories sake so divine a thing ? Or
 “ is it not diviner to do good, even where it
 “ may be thought inglorious, even to the
 “ ungrateful, and to those who are wholly
 “ insensible of the good they receive ? How
 “ comes it then, that what is *divine* in us
 “ should lose its character in the *divine Be-*
 “ *ing* ; and that according as the *Deity* is re-
 “ presented to us, he should more resemble
 “ the weak, womanish and impotent part of
 “ our nature, than the generous, manly and
 “ divine ? ”

Now the sum of all this kind of reasoning.
 can amount only to this, that it is inconsistent
 with Divine goodness, to make any man suffer
 for the denying of the Divine Being. I desire
 that I may always have the highest Venerati-
 on possible for the Divine goodness, and am

very ready to grant, with this Author, ^a “ that
 “ nothing but what is morally excellent can
 “ have place in the Deity ;” and that “ unless
 “ we be satisfied that he is good, and cannot de-
 “ ceive us, there can be no real religious faith or
 “ confidence ;” and moreover, that, “ if there
 “ be really some thing previous to Revelation,
 “ some antecedent demonstration of Reason
 “ to assure us, that God is, and, withal, that
 “ he is so good, as not to deceive us ; the
 “ same reason, if we will trust to it, will de-
 “ monstrate to us, that God is so good, as to
 “ exceed the very best of us in Goodness ?”

Yet, notwithstanding, I can by no means de-
 duce the same general conclusion which this
 Author does in these words, *after this man-
 ner, we can have no dread or suspicion to
 render us uneasy : for it is MALICE on-
 ly, and not GOODNESS, that can make
 us afraid.* Indeed a good man, who always
 acts sincerely, according to his best under-
 standing, and is ever ready to be governed by
 those principles of Religion, which the High-
 est and most unprejudiced reason will assure
 him are worthy of God, has no reason to be
 afraid of any deficiency in the Divine good-
 ness

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ness towards him, which is ever ready to compassionate even all such mistakes as are purely involuntary. But what is this to a man, that having means of knowing God, yet either utterly denies, or takes no notice of his Being? All men indeed, by reason of their different degrees of understanding, cannot have equally perfect notions of the Nature of God and his Attributes: But there is no man who has attained to the use of his reason, but he can evidently discover that he did not make himself: And I hope I have formerly shewn, that *there is no man of so remote a province, as to be out of the hearing of the name and actions of the great Governour of the world.* The visible Creation is a book open to all men, and every man carries his own Mind about him; and these grounds for the belief of a God and his Providence, are neither weak nor frivolous. Such a Belief, is so far from assuming an Opinion contrary to the appearance of things, or putting a lye upon the understanding, or believing at a venture, and against our Reason, that if I should say with the Psalmist, that the *Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work---* and that *there is neither speech nor language, where their voice is not heard;*
the

the reasoning of an heathen Author would bear testimony to it, who tells us, ^r that *That man must be void of all mind or understanding himself, who thinks that there is no superior mind directing the wonderful order of the Heavenly bodies, and preserving the incredible constancy of their motions, upon which the preservation and well-being of all things has so great a dependence.* And what the natural consequence arising from hence is, we are told in another place by the same Author, even where he is as much as may be discouraging all superstition^s: *That there is some supreme, excellent and eternal Being; and that the same Being is to be had in the greatest reverence and admiration by all mankind, the Beautiful frame of the world, and the order of the Heavenly bodies forces us to confess.* Now it is certain, that no man, who disputes against the Being of God, can justly pretend

^r Cælestium [for so it should be read, and not Cælestem] ergo admirabilem ordinem, incredibilemque constantiam, ex qua conservatio & salus omnium omnis oritur, qui vacare mente putat, is ipse mentis expers habendus est. *Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2. cap. 21.*

^s Esse præstantem aliquam æternamq; naturam & eam suspiciendam admirandamque hominum generi, pulchritudo mundi ordoque rerum cælestium cogit confiteri. *Cic. de Divinat. lib. 2. in fine.*

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pretend ignorance of his Being. Nor can the denial of his Being, consist with any kind of reverence or admiration of him; [†] for the very first instance and foundation of all respect which we can pay him, must be an *acknowledgment of his Being*. Let it then but be granted, that there are eternal and necessary differences of things, and that the Will of God determines it self always to act, according to the Eternal reason and nature of things, and that all Rational creatures are naturally obliged to conform themselves in all their actions, to the eternal Rule of reason; it will from thence follow, that there are Unchangeable moral obligations, or Laws of nature, respecting man's behaviour towards the Supreme Being, whose creature and subject he is, as well as towards his fellow creatures. And if right Reason be the same thing, though in infinitely higher degree, in God, as in other rational Beings; it must also necessarily be his will, that all creatures should act according to their moral obligations: And consequently, as there are natural evil consequences attending upon the perversion of the natural order of things, and manifest evils and inconveniencies both

[†] Primus deorum cultus est Deos credere . &c. Vide Senec. *Epist.* 95.

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both to society and to private persons, flowing from the transgression of the moral natural law; so it cannot be consistent with the divine reason, which is infinite wisdom, to make no difference between those that chuse to act agreeably to the moral nature of things, and those that wilfully act otherwise; that is, he cannot have the same regard for those who disown his Being and Providence, as for those who own and obey him.

There is no occasion to suppose any Malice, or any defect of Goodness in the divine Nature, for making this difference, which the very nature of things makes: And it is far from being the perfection of Goodness, to make those equal, whose merits, or moral actions, are unequal. And if this way of arguing, from the notion of God's goodness, were just, then for the same reason he ought never to suffer any man to be miserable, whatever his demerits are. But we see in fact, that he has done it; and these miseries are real punishments upon mankind, for their wilful transgressing the laws of Reason and Nature. So that we must either deny that there is any Supreme mind governing the world, or believe it consistent with his infinite goodness to punish those, that is, suffer them to be miserable, who

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who deny his Being, if he is a Being to whom we have any natural relation or obligation.

And thus men may certainly be under a natural obligation to the belief of a God, and may make themselves incapable of receiving any good from him by an obstinate denial of his Existence; since, upon the the acknowledgment of his Existence, depends all the sense of natural duty that we can owe him. And farther, whoever denies the Being and Providence of God, must necessarily own, that he lives in a distracted universe, where there is nothing of good or lovely to be depended on, because there is no wise or intelligent mind to order and govern it. And the forementioned Author, drawn by the mere force of Truth, owns (in his *Enquiry concerning Virtue*^v)

“ that such an opinion as this may by degrees
 “ embitter the temper, and not only make
 “ the love of virtue to be less felt, but help
 “ to impair and ruin the very principle of virtue, *viz. natural and kind affection*; and
 “ that ’tis scarce possible to prevent a natural
 “ kind of abhorrence and spleen, which will
 “ be entertain’d, and kept alive, by the imagination of so perverse an order of things:
 “ ^w and in conclusion, that virtue cannot be
 “ complet

^v P. 70.

^w *Ib.* p. 73.

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“ compleat without Piety, since, where this
 “ is wanting, there can neither be the same
 “ Benignity, Firmness or Constancy, the same
 “ good Composure of the Affections, or U-
 “ niformity of Mind. And thus the per-
 “ fection and height of virtue, (even in his
 “ judgment) must be owing to the belief of
 “ a God.”

And now upon the whole, if that *abhor-
 rence* and *spleen*, which he allows to be the
 natural result of *Atheism*, be indeed a plague
 and punishment to him that falls under it, as
 it certainly is; then men have reason to dread
 the consequences of such an opinion, which
 can promise no good, and may be the cause
 of many unforeseen evils, as long as the mind
 it self shall exist. And if, moreover, the Su-
 preme Governour of the world cannot but re-
 stify his favour and displeasure, according as
 rational creatures act, for or against the obli-
 gations of their rational nature, then this fa-
 vour or displeasure must shew themselves some
 time or other, in different effects upon those
 rational Agents, according as they use their
 natural liberty of acting, well or ill; unless
 we imagine, that moral perfections in the Di-
 vine, or supreme, Being, have no manner of
 analogy to moral perfections in other rational
 Beings,

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Beings, which is to destroy all manner of Argument from the Nature of things.

So that both from the consideration of the natural and necessary difference of Good and Evil, and the different consequences resulting from them; and also from the consideration of the moral Attributes and perfections of the Supreme Being, different events of different actions, and of different habitual regards towards that Supreme Being, are justly to be expected by every rational Agent. But if, by reason of the great mixture, variety and complication of Cases, these Events cannot at present be applied distinctly, in just proportion, to every particular man, as we plainly see in fact, they neither are nor can be; then it is no way inconsistent with divine Goodness, how infinite soever, to suffer such distinction, as is agreeable to the moral Attributes of the Deity, to have its due effect hereafter; that is, to assign a future time of rewarding and punishing, wherein every thing shall be as well adjusted in the moral world, as we can now discover things to be in the natural.

This is reasonable to be expected, from the clearest notions we can frame of divine perfection:

But

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But how it will be done particularly, we must either be ignorant till that time comes; when the distinction shall be finally made, and the present complication of things unfolded; or we must, in the mean time, learn it from the divine Being himself, some way discovering his design or will to us in this matter.

And this will naturally lead us to consider, whether he has made any particular discovery of his will to man; that is, whether there be really any such thing as a divine Revelation. Of which Matter, I shall, with God's assistance, speak farther hereafter.



SERMON



SERMON X.

Preached *February* the 3^d 17¹⁷/₁₈.

Isaiah ii. 3.

*And many people shall go, and say,
Come ye, and let us go up to the
mountain of the Lord, to the house
of the God of Jacob, and he will
teach us of his ways, and we will
walk in his paths; for out of Zion
shall go forth the law, and the word
of the Lord from Jerusalem.*



It may be observed, that these very
words, as also those which go
before, and those which follow
them, are made use of by the

U

Prophet

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Prophet *Micah* ^a, who lived in the same age with this Prophet *Isaiab*; which makes them the more remarkable. And that they are a prophecy, relating to the times of the Messias, or kingdom of Christ, as is evident, from that mention of the *last days* with which they are introduced, is, I suppose, generally agreed. And that they are intended, to signify such a disposition in mens minds, and such a state of things, when many people of different nations should be inquisitive about that revelation of the Will of God, which was to have its beginning among the people of the *Jews*, is plain from the words themselves. But my design, at present, is not to enquire exactly, either into the particular time to which these words of the Prophets immediately refer, or into the particular manner in which they are most compleatly fulfilled, under the Gospel dispensation; whether at the first promulgation of it, which begun from *Jerusalem*, or at the further bringing in of the rest of the Gentile world, with the more full and entire conversion of the *Jews*, to the Faith of Christ: which from many passages, both of the Old and New Testament, is justly expected to be accom-

^a *Mic.* iv. 2.

accomplished one time or other, as the providence of God shall make way for it.

What I now intend, is only to make use of the words with a more general view, as they express a sincere desire in many different people, of being better informed in the mind and will of God, by some particular Revelation from himself, than they could be by the mere natural light of their own minds, reflecting only upon the general works of Creation and Providence. And from viewing them in this light, I shall take occasion to observe the following particulars.

I. That every Rational man, who believes a God and a Providence governing the world, is under a natural obligation, to enquire whether God has made any particular Revelation of his will to men, which they are any way concerned to take notice of.

II. That whoever seriously makes this enquiry, will find it reasonable to conclude, that some Revelation may justly be expected from God, considering the general state of mankind.

III. That if this be so, then it is every man's duty, to use all the proper means he can, to find out what is true Revelation, and what is only pretended.

I. That every Rational man, who believes a God and a Providence governing the world, is under a natural obligation to enquire, whether God has made any particular Revelation of his will to men, which they are any way concerned to take notice of. This proposition may perhaps, at the first sight, seem to be altogether needless, as containing only an assertion, which no one will offer seriously to deny: But I am afraid, that in fact, much of that which goes under the name of *Deism*, in the world, has at the bottom no other foundation, but either what may be justly counted a virtual denial of this assertion, or what will in the end revert to downright *Atheism*; that is, such men as affect the name of *Deists*, in opposition to all revealed Religion, either mean nothing more than mere *Atheism* by it, but only to avoid, the trouble of considering the force of such arguments, as lie strong against the plain denial of the Being of a God; and so by seeming to allow them, they are willing to wave all opposition of that kind: Or else, if they do in truth believe the Arguments for his Being, to be conclusive, and yet make no enquiry after his will, they must then believe his Existence only as a Speculative point;

point; which is indeed true in it self, but which, they think, does not put them under any obligation of acting one way or other, in consequence of it. This kind of Deism is, I confess, but one remove from Atheism it self; because, though it owns a God, who is the Governour of the natural world, yet at the same time it considers him, as having little or no concern for the moral world, or the actions of men, consider'd as moral or rational Agents; which is in consequence, a denying or not owning of his moral Attributes. Upon this consideration therefore, to convince such men of their obligation to enquire after the will of God, we must first desire them to consider, That *Justice, Goodness, Truth*, and all moral perfections, are as essential to the notion of God, or Supreme Intelligent Being, as *Wisdom* or *Power*; for they are indeed the necessary consequences of infinite Wisdom and Power. It cannot be denied, but that there are different things in the world, which have different powers and properties, different kinds and degrees of perfections; and from hence, in the very nature of things, arise different relations of one thing to another, and a fitness or unfitness, according as different things are applied or misapplied to one another. And

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there is the same natural difference, and natural consequence of that difference, fitness or unfitness, in all actions of every Being which can be properly called an *Agent*.

Now an infinitely wise Being, who preserves all these things in their proper natures, certainly knows all these different relations of things and actions, with their respective fitnesses and consequences; or else his understanding would be imperfect and finite. And he does as evidently will that they should be as they are, because he preserves them in their Beings; and his will cannot be influenced by any wrong affection, raised by any temptation from without, to do otherwise than what he knows to be, that is, what really is, best and fittest to be done; because he is independent and Omnipotent. So that *Goodness*, *Justice*, *Truth*, and all moral perfections, must be in the Divine nature, unless we can suppose, that he wills the natures of things, to be as they are, and not to be as they are, at the same time, which is a manifest contradiction.

Again, *Goodness*, in any Free or Rational Being, is nothing else but a will or disposition, to communicate happiness or Good to other Beings, according to their Capacities. Now to communicate Being it self, and a Capacity

city of enjoying happiness, or good, according to that variety of natures, which infinite Wisdom thought fit to make, is the very original and foundation of all Goodness; and to communicate this farther, according to those different improvements which Intelligent and Active Beings make, by virtue of that liberty of acting, which is essential to their nature, is a continuation of that Goodness. So that, in comparison of all other Beings which are called good, we may truly say, with our Saviour, *that there is none good* (that is originally and essentially so) *but God only.*

Justice and Equity are nothing else but the application of the proper consequences of actions to the persons acting; that is, a willing that the original and essential differences of things and actions, and their relations and fitnesses to one another, should be entirely preserved throughout. Now the Supreme Being, who knows all things, and understands all actions; that is, judges of them just as they are, will act accordingly, without partiality or respect of persons; his infinite wisdom and power, setting him above all possibility of being either deceived, or overruled in his acting. And for the same reason, *Truth* and *Faithfulness* are necessarily Attributes of the same di-

vine Being, who can neither be mistaken in his designs, nor hindered from doing what he intends. And the like may be said of all other moral perfections. For, in short, the want of, or failure in, any moral perfection, must proceed, either from a defect of understanding, that is, from apprehending things to be otherwise than they really are; or from a want of power to act according to the nature of things; or from perverseness of will disposing him to act contrary, to the true reason, or nature and fitness of things: but an eternal, intelligent, independent Being, infinitely wise and powerful, can be liable to none of these; for the two first cases are directly, and the last, by necessary consequence, a contradiction to infinite Wisdom and Power.

From hence it follows, that the moral perfections of all Creatures must be finite and limited, and capable of continual improvement, according to the extent of their wisdom and power; but the moral perfections of the Supreme Being, or First cause of all things, must be infinite and absolute. But then it does not from thence follow, that *Goodness*, *Justice*, *Truth*, and other moral perfections, are in their nature or kind, quite different things in the divine Being, from what they are in other rational

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rational Beings, but only in degree. And this ought to be the more carefully observed, because, if *Goodness, Truth* and *Justice*, and the like moral Attributes which we ascribe to God Almighty, be not the same for kind, as they are in those Idea's which we frame of the like perfections in rational creatures, or in our abstracted reasonings about them from the nature of things; then it is in vain to reason at all about them: Since, upon such supposition, when we say, God is *just*, or *good*, or *true*, we can have no meaning at all, because we have no notion or idea of any thing answering to the words we utter: And this would effectually destroy the foundation, not only of Religion but of all Morality. It certainly takes away all manner of reasoning about the Divine Nature. For the natural Attributes of God, his Understanding and Power, are as much above us, as his moral Attributes or Perfections, and our Idea's of them as imperfect; so that if we cannot reason from the one, we cannot reason from the other.

Those men therefore, who pretend to magnify Reason so much, should consider very well what it is, before they admit such a supposition, which in effect destroys all use of Reason

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Reason itself. For if true Reason be nothing else but the real nature of things, and their relations and proportions to one another truly apprehended in the mind to be as they are in themselves, then it must be the same for kind in all Intelligent Beings; or else in effect the same will be true and not true at the same time, which is a plain contradiction. Of two different Minds or Understandings, which are of vastly different abilities one above another, one may apprehend a great many more things, together with their natures, consequences and relations, than the other does, which is of less capacity, and so can reason further; but those things which both of them apprehend clearly, distinctly and truly, as they are in themselves, they must necessarily so far apprehend alike, or else there never could be any reasoning at all from the nature of things.

Upon this principle therefore, That true Reason, as far as it reaches, is of the same kind in all intelligent Beings, *Tully* very justly lays the foundation of the Law of Nature, which is nothing else but the Eternal Reason of things, which must always be the same as long as things themselves exist. And to this purpose are these and the like expressions in
his

his first book *De Legibus*.^b Since there is nothing more excellent than Reason, which is the same in Man and in God, the first relation (or society) between God and Man, is, that of Reason: And if reason be common to both, right Reason is so: which being the Law (of Nature) then there is a Law in which both agree. And again, ^cVirtue (or moral Perfection) is the same in Man as in the Divine Being. For Virtue is nothing else but nature advanced to its highest perfection. There is therefore (in this) a resemblance between God and Man. Now this is the same, in effect, as to say, that Man, in his most perfect state, is made after the image of God. And much to the same purpose in his second book *De Legibus*, he tells us, ^dThis is the judgment of the wisest men among

^b Est igitur, quoniam nihil est ratione melius, eaque & in homine & in Deo, prima homini cum Deo rationis societas. Inter quos autem Ratio, inter eosdem etiam recta ratio communis est: Quæ cum sit lex, lege quoque consociati homines cum Diis putandi sumus, &c.

^c Jam verò virtus eadem in homine ac Deo est, neque ullo alio ingenio præterea. Est autem virtus nihil aliud quam in se perfecta & ad summum perducta natura. Est igitur homini cum Deo similitudo, &c.

^d Hanc igitur video sapientissimorum fuisse sententiam, legem neque hominum ingeniis excogitatam, neque scitum aliquod

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*among the Ancients, that Law (i. e. Law natural) is not any human device, ordinance, or decree of any people or state, but something Eternal which governs the whole world, a perfect Wisdom in commanding what is fit and forbidding the contrary. So, they said, that principal and supreme Law was the Mind of God himself, commanding or prohibiting every thing, according to exact reason and the nature of things. From whence that Law, which God has given to mankind, derives its just commendation, it being the very reason and understanding of one truly wise, which has a natural aptitude to direct what is fit to be enjoined or forbidden. And again he says,^e The force or power, of this supreme Law, is not only of older date than
any*

aliquod esse populorum, sed æternum quiddam, quod universum mundum regeret, imperandi prohibendique, sapientia. Ita principem legem illam & ultimam, mentem esse dicebant omnia ratione, aut cogentis, aut vetantis Dei: ex qua illa lex quam Dii humano generi dederunt, rectè est laudata: est enim ratio mensque sapientis ad jubendum & ad deterrendum idonea.

^e Quæ vis non modo senior est quam ætas populorum & civitatum, sed æqualis illius cælum atque terras tuentis & regentis Dei: neque enim esse Mens Divina sine ratione potest, nec ratio divina non hanc vim in rectis pravisque sancientis habere.

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any people or community of men, but is co-æval with God himself, who preserves and governs heaven and earth: For neither can the Divine Mind be otherwise than rational, nor can the Divine Reason exist without having this power or property of giving a sanction to the difference between Good and Evil. And then observing, that some particular worthy and unworthy actions there mentioned, were in themselves good or evil, before any written Law describing them to be such, by virtue of that antecedent, inward and eternal Law of Reason, he adds, ^f that it was Reason, proceeding from the nature of things, prompting to do right and restraining from doing wrong, which did not then commence a Law when it was first put into writing, but when it had its first original: Now it had the same original with the Divine Mind or Understanding. From whence he makes this conclusion, ^g Wherefore that true and supreme Law, which has a proper fitness

^f Erat enim ratio perfecta à rerum natura, & ad recte faciendum impellens & à delicto avocans: quæ non tum denique incipit lex esse cum scripta est, sed tum cum orta est; orta autem simul est cum mente divina.

^g Quamobrem lex vera atque princeps, apta ad jubendum & ad vetandum, ratio est recta summi Jovis.

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fitness to command and forbid, is the right (or perfect) Reason of the Supreme Being.^h

I have been the more particular in taking notice of this opinion of *Tully* in the matter before us, not only because he himself lays great stress upon it, and likewise affirms it to be the judgment of the wisest Heathens before him, in deducing the true nature of Laws from their original: But also because it plainly shews, that those men who now pretend to be Deists, *i. e.* to believe a God and a Providence over the natural world, and yet imagine, either that he is no way concerned about the nature and consequences of human actions, or that we can have no such true notion of his moral Attributes as to argue any thing from them, are not yet advanced so far in the knowledge of the true grounds, either of Natural Religion or Morality, as Thinking Men among the Heathens were.

And

^h *And to this purpose there is a large passage out of his 3d Book de Republica, preserved to us by Lactantius (lib. 6. de vero cultu, cap. 8) in which he declares the Eternity and Immutability of this Law, and concludes after this manner : — Unusque erit communis quasi magister, & imperator omnium Deus ille, legis hujus inventor, disceptator, lator : cui qui non parebit, ipse se fugiet ac naturam hominis aspernabitur, atque hoc ipso luet maximas pœnas, etiamsi cætera supplicia, quæ putantur, effugerit.*

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And much less can they have any notion of governing themselves by such a precept as that of our blessed Saviour in the Gospel, of *being perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect*,ⁱ unless it be first owned, that we are capable of understanding what the moral Perfections of God, which we should endeavour to imitate, signify, by their being of the same nature with the correspondent perfections in men.

But now, if moral perfections, such as *Goodness, Justice and Truth*, do necessarily belong to the Supreme Intelligent Being. And if we can have any true notion of such perfections, we may then justly argue, that God Almighty does always act according to those perfections, especially in his dealings with Rational Creatures, capable of understanding what those perfections mean : and consequently that he considers the actions of Rational and Free Agents, according to their moral nature, as they are good or evil ; that is, as they agree or disagree with the eternal rules of Goodness, Justice and Truth : and that he respects

ⁱ Καθ' ἡμᾶς γὰρ ἡ αὐτὴ ἀρετὴ ἐστὶ τῶν μακαρίων πάντων, ὥστε καὶ ἡ αὐτὴ ἀρετὴ ἀνθρώπων καὶ Θεῶν· διόπερ γίνεσθαι τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐξάντιον τέλειός ἐστι, διδασκόμεθα, &c. *Origen. contra Cels.* lib. 4. pag. 180.

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respects them accordingly, and will in due time make such a proper distinction between them, as will evidently declare and vindicate his own moral perfections. For if he is the Governor of the whole world, that is, of the Rational as well as Natural world, he will govern it according to these perfections which are inseparable from an infinitely perfect reasonable Being. This is allowed to be a reasonable way of arguing, even by ^k *Cotta* the *Academic* in *Tully*, in that very discourse where he is endeavouring to render the *Stoical* arguments, for Providence over Human Affairs, uncertain and ineffectual. But then we must not from hence conclude, that he does not thus govern the world, only because at present we do not see this difference, which we expect from the nature of moral Good and Evil, entirely and finally made by an immediate application of consequent Rewards and Punishments, in proportion to the respective behaviour of every Rational or Free Agent. For we must remember, that we cannot see the

^k Ut enim nec domus, nec respublica ratione quadam & disciplina designata videatur si in ea nec rectè factis præmia essent ulla, nec supplicia peccatis, sic mundi divina in homines moderatio profectò nulla est, si in ea discrimen nullum est bonorum & malorum. *Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. 3. cap. 35.*

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the full extent of his Government, but only a very small part of it; and therefore though we may argue, from the perfection of his nature, that he loves Righteousness and hates Iniquity, and consequently will, in the issue of things, treat them after a different manner; yet the Revelation of his righteous Judgment is not confined to so short a time, or within so narrow a compass, as the execution of human justice must be, which is limited by time and place, and must either exert itself at present, or not at all. And from hence it happens, that *Justice*, *Goodness*, and other moral excellencies in men, (even in the best human Governors) do often intrench upon and limit one another, so that they cannot all be fully exercised, for want of sufficient compass to exert themselves altogether, and for want of sufficient power and knowledge of things in the agent. But God's Government is infinite and eternal, not limited by time or place; so that his Goodness and Justice, and every other perfection, may each of them have their full exercise, and not interfere with one another: and the due effects of each may take place in such season as infinite wisdom sees most proper. Therefore before we can pass an exact judgment upon the justice and good-

ness of his Government, we must see the whole scheme of Providence unfolded, and all the various dependences of things, upon one another, set in a true light. We must wait for the final issue of things, and when that is come, we may depend upon it, that the whole management will appear just and good, even according to our most natural notions of Justice and Goodness; that is, according to the truth and reason of things all fairly stated together.

If what I have hitherto said, concerning the Moral Perfections of the Divine Being and their exercise, should be thought a digression from the design of that proposition upon which I first begun; I desire it may be considered, that, unless we be fully persuaded of the certainty of those Attributes of God, and of the reasonableness of arguing from them, we cannot have any firm and stable foundation of our own moral obligations in respect of him: because we do then in effect shut out the Divine Being from having any relation to us, as we are men, *i. e.* moral or rational and free Agents; inasmuch as we do by consequence deny either him or our selves to be such Agents. But on the contrary, if our Rational Nature is so derived from the Divine Nature

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as to bear a resemblance to it, in its capacity of acting freely according to the nature of things; this gives us a moral relation to God himself, ¹ a relation of a quite different kind from that of all other creatures, which have no knowledge of him. He is indeed the Author of their Being, as well as of ours; and he governs them by his Wisdom and Power in a way suitable to their nature, though they are not capable of reflecting upon it. But he is a Governor of Men and all Rational Beings in a sense vastly superior, as they are capable of knowing him, and the relation they bear to him; and by knowing it, own an obligation of willingly conforming themselves to the Laws of his Government, which are the eternal dictates of right Reason.

Upon this foundation therefore I think we may justly build that natural obligation, which

X 2

every

¹ Nam quod aliquibus cohærent homines, è mortali genere sumpserunt quæ fragilia essent & caduca: Animum esse ingeneratum à Deo, ex quo vere vel agnatio nobis cum cælestibus, vel genus, vel stirps appellari potest. Itaque ex tot generibus nullum est animal præter hominem quod habeat notitiam aliquam Dei.—Ex quo efficitur illud ut is agnoscat Deum qui unde ortus sit quasi recordetur ac noscat. Jam vero virtus eadem in homine ac Deo est, neque ullo alio ingenio præterea.—Est igitur homini cum Deo similitudo: Quod cum ita sit, quæ tandem potest esse propior certiorve cognatio. *Cic. de Legg. lib. 1.*

every Rational man, who believes a God and a Providence governing the world, is under, to enquire, whether God has made any particular Revelation of his will, which men can be any way concerned to take notice of.

For if we are persuaded, by the Light of Nature and Reason, that there is a Supreme Being who made and preserves us, and from whom we received our reasonable nature, whereby we are capable of owning him; the same light will convince us, that there is a natural duty of Gratitude owing from us to this Supreme Benefactor. And ^m if we are not affected with a sense of Gratitude for these benefits, which, even in the natural course of things, we constantly receive from Providence, we are not (in *Tully's* judgment) to be reckoned in the number of men, that is, of reasonable creatures. But now, since the Divine Nature is infinitely perfect and happy in itself, wherein can any gratitude towards him approve itself? Not in giving him any thing by way of return, because he is already possess'd of all things; but in a just acknowledg-
ment

^m Quem vero astrorum ordines, quem dierum noctiumque vicissitudines, quem mensium temperatio, quemque ea, quæ gignuntur nobis ad fruendum, non gratum esse cogunt, hunc hominem omnino numerare qui decet? *Cic. de Legg. lib. 2.*

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ment of his infinite perfections, and in worthily receiving and using what his goodness gives us ; that is, in imploying all the powers and faculties, which he has given us, according to his will and design, however it be made known to us. And since, from the consideration of the moral perfections of his nature, we are assured, that he himself chuses to act according to the highest Reason ; and since it must also be his will, that all rational creatures should chuse the same, that is, in effect, should desire and endeavour, that their wills should be directed by his will, which is therefore absolutely perfect, because it always chuses according to that infinite and unerring wisdom, which knows what is best and fittest to be done in every case that can happen, both with respect to the present time and all futurity : Upon these considerations we are certainly obliged, in reason, to be as much acquainted with the will of God as we can ; and therefore to consider of every possible way, whereby we may come to the knowledge of it.

For thus we may argue. A constant disposition to do according to the will of God, upon whom we depend for our Being, and for all our powers and faculties of acting, is

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an absolutely fit and reasonable instance of our gratitude towards him. This is the very perfection of *Piety*, which we may, with ⁿ*Tully*, call *Justice towards God*; since it is nothing else but ascribing to him, in the most effectual manner, that honour of his infinite perfections, which is justly due to him, by conforming our selves to them. Now this disposition, to conform our selves constantly to the will of God, must necessarily include, or presuppose, an endeavour to know what this will is, and by consequence to enquire, what ways he has thought fit to make any part of it known to us: [unless we are before hand certain, that it is impossible for him to discover it any other way, but this one which we call the way of nature, ° which, as I shall have occasion to shew hereafter, we cannot be.]

For though we may depend upon it, as his will, that we should never act contrary to the Rules of Goodness, Truth and Justice, because whatever is evidently contrary to these, contradicts his very nature, and cannot be his will;

ⁿ Est enim Pietas Justitia adversum Deos, *Cic. de Nat. Deorum*, lib. I. cap. 41.

° See the following Sermon.

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will; and though he has given us the faculty of Reason, whereby to distinguish Good from evil, and a liberty to chuse according to that distinction; yet, because our Understandings are limited, so that we are not always able presently to see that entire connection which one action has with another, but, without the utmost attention, may be apt to mistake appearances for truth, and to act accordingly, (especially in matters of Religion or intercourse with the Divine Being) whereby we may run into great confusion, as we see in fact the greatest part of mankind have done: We cannot but think it reasonable, to wish or desire a more particular direction, if it may be had, from that Being himself, who cannot be mistaken. And this at least ought to put us upon enquiry, Whether this Being has, any where, made any such discovery, as will either give us greater light into our duty, or direct us to better assistance or clearer motives to the steady performance of it. And here it was that the generality of Mankind first begun to fail. Even the Philosophers themselves, of almost all Sects, neglected to *seek after God* in this respect. *They did not glorify him as God*, by owning his moral perfections to such a degree as they ought to

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have done. Their Piety seldom went so far as either to pray unto him, or give him thanks for their own improvement in virtue or moral perfection. In this they depended too much upon themselves and their own natural abilities, and made their chief application to the Deity only for things of an inferior nature. Their opinion was too much like that of the Poet,

--*Satis est orare Jovem quæ donat & aufert ;
Det vitam, det opes : æquum mihi animum ip-
se parabo.*

And Cotta, in ^a Tully, represents it as a general doctrine: *Virtutem nemo unquam acceptam Deo retulit : i. e.* No man thinks himself beholding to God for his Virtue: And he commends the opinion as *right, because* (says he) *to be virtuous is just matter of praise, which it could not be if it were the gift of God,* with much more to the same purpose, which he sums up after this manner, *Judicium hoc omnium mortalium est, fortunam à Deo petendam, à se ipso sumendam esse sapientiam.* And thus, according to St. Paul, *Professing them-*

^p Horat. Ep. 18. lib. 1.

^a De Nat. Deor. l. 3. cap. 36.

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themselves wise, they became fools; and by forsaking the true knowledge of God, they were led away to all manner of immorality. For as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind: a mind that could not sufficiently distinguish between good and evil, but easily drawn to do those things which are not convenient.

The fatal consequence which attended this neglect of application to God, for true wisdom to direct men in the moral conduct of their lives, may shew us our obligation, in interest as well as duty, to enquire seriously, Whether God has any way afforded means of further light, than what we our selves can collect from unassisted natural Reason, to direct us in attaining the utmost knowledge of his will. And this should now lead me to consider the second thing which I proposed to speak to, *viz.*

II. *That whoever seriously makes this enquiry, will find it reasonable to conclude, that some Revelation may justly be expected from God, considering the general state of mankind.*

But

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But because I cannot go through with the full consideration of this at present, I shall forbear to enter upon it; and shall rather chuse to conclude this discourse with an earnest exhortation, to all such as, by the principles of Reason, are convinced of the Being of God and his moral Attributes, That they would live up to this Light of their own Reason in their further enquiry after the Revelation of the Will of God.

'Tis owned on all hands, that Passion, and Prejudice, and Partiality, arising from unruly lusts and appetites of any kind, are great impediments to the finding and embracing of Truth, especially such Truth as is likely to contradict those prevailing Passions. And therefore, if we are honest and sincere in our searches after Truth, we must first free ourselves from these impediments, that is, we must live so as not to have any bias upon our minds against the practice of Religion, if, upon enquiry, we should find reason to believe its principles true. This is but a very reasonable thing to desire, of those who allow the steady practice of all virtue to be the happiness and perfection of human nature, at the same time that they question or doubt of the truth of all Revealed Religion, as divers of the Hea-
then

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then Philosophers held, and some of those who pretend to be their great admirers would still seem to hold. Such men cannot say, that we desire any thing of them against their own profess'd interest. Nay, considering the advantage, which the belief of the principles of Religion may be of, to support them under any untoward circumstances of discouragement, one would think they could hardly take it amiss of us, if we should even entreat them to admit those principles, for probable at least, and to practise accordingly, till by serious enquiry they could discover them to be false. But some men are so perverse, as to interpret any thing of this kind to be an unjust prejudice in favour of Religion. An Author, whom I have had occasion formerly to mention, tells us,^r That “ It is the most beg-
 “ garly refuge imaginable, which is so migh-
 “ tily cry'd up, and stands as a great maxim
 “ with many able men, *That they should*
 “ *strive to have Faith and believe to the*
 “ *utmost : because if after all, there be no-*
 “ *thing in the matter, there will be no harm*
 “ *in being thus deceived ; but if there be*
 “ *anything, it will be fatal for them not to*
 “ have

^r *Characteristics Letter concerning Enthusiasm, pag. 36.*

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“ *have believed to the full.* But, (*says he*)
 “ they are so far mistaken, that whilst they have
 “ this thought, ’tis certain they can never be-
 “ lieve, either to their satisfaction and happi-
 “ ness in this world, or with any advantage
 “ of recommendation to another. For besides
 “ that our Reason, which knows the cheat,
 “ will never rest thoroughly satisfied on such a
 “ bottom, but turn us often a drift, and toss
 “ us in a sea of doubt and perplexity; we
 “ cannot but actually grow worse in Religion,
 “ and entertain a worse opinion still of a su-
 “ preme *Deity*, whilst our belief is founded
 “ on so injurious a Thought of him.

Now indeed, if those *able men*, as he calls
 them in way of derision, had either desired
 us to believe against our own certain know-
 ledge, or had, by pretence of this Argument,
 discouraged us from enquiring into the grounds
 of Religion, or the motives to believe it;
 then there might have been some colour for
 this untoward Reflection. But when they
 only represent the case of Religion as it really
 stands, *viz.* That the principles of it give a
 just prospect of great advantage, both present
 and future, to the mind of man, if they be
 true, and be believed, and in practice owned
 to be so; and that there can be no possible
 disad-

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disadvantage, in the future at least, to such as are willing to live virtuously, from the present belief of them, even though they should in the end prove to have been in a mistake; I cannot see how we could reasonably advise a wise man to act otherwise than on the safe side, till he could, to his own satisfaction, evidently prove, that the contrary was true. For this is, in effect, only desiring him not to conclude them absolutely false, at the same time that he owns they may possibly be true. That we cannot *believe to our full satisfaction or happiness while we doubt*, I readily grant; but what is this to the Argument? For we must either believe the fundamental principles of Religion to be true or false, or else we must be doubtful about them. Now though there be no satisfaction in being doubtful, yet there may be some hope, though mixed with fear; and this will be some comfort to a man's mind, so long as he keeps honestly to that side where the hope lies. But those who believe them false, can pretend to no hope at all of what will be hereafter, but that of utter extinction; and what comfort can there be in that, even at present, but only to those who are already incurably miserable, and must be so as long as they do exist? This is certainly a very
unhappy

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unhappy cure for doubt and perplexity, which can never mend our case while we are sensible of it. Admitting the opinion of those, who think that death puts an utter end to our being, to be true, what *ground can it give them* (as ^s *Tully* says) *either of joy or boasting?* If therefore there be no entire satisfaction, in doubting about the Being of a Providence, and a future State; nor any comfort to a rational mind, in the utter disbelief of them: Then certainly, if we could by any means arrive at a full persuasion of the Truth of them, it would be a very desirable thing. And therefore to apply this Argument, to persuade men not to be unconcerned in the serious and honest examination of the grounds of Religion, nor to be obstinate, in standing out against reasonable evidence; even though it should fall short of strict demonstration, is no putting a *cheat upon our Reason*, because there is a necessity of acting one way or other. Nor can I see, how it is any *injuriously thought of the Deity*, for a man to think it more for his happiness, to believe that there is

^s Præclarum autem nescio quid adepti sunt qui didicerunt, se, cum tempus mortis venisset, totos esse perituros. Quod ut sit——— quid habet ista res aut lætabile aut gloriosum? *Cic. Tuscul. Disp. lib. 1. cap. 21.*

is such an infinitely perfect Being, than not, even while he doubts of his Existence, (supposing it possible, for a man honestly to doubt of it). Is it any dishonour to that *Being*, for us to think, that if he do exist at all, he is so good as to make it our interest to believe his Existence? or is it any means of making us *entertain a worse opinion of the Deity*, to believe that the moral perfections of *Justice, Goodness and Truth*, belong to him, and that he makes a real distinction between good and evil, if he govern the world?

I have been induced to take notice of this passage, because it seems to be directly pointed at an Argument, which some of the best and most judicious writers (both *Heathens* and *Christians*) have made use of to persuade men,

^c Of Heathen Authors I shall only mention Tully and Plato. Tully, besides the fore-mentioned place in his Tusculan Questions, has also this passage in the conclusion of his Cato major. His mihi rebus, (i. e. from several considerations depending upon the Soul's immortality) levis est senectus, nec solum non molesta sed etiam jucunda. Quod si in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortales esse credam, lubenter erro: Nec mihi hunc errorem quo delector, dum vivo, extorqueri volo. Sin mortuus (ut quidam minuti philosophi censent) nihil sentiam, non vereor ne hunc errorem meum mortui philosophi irrideant. To this purpose, Plato, in the person of Socrates, in divers places, particularly in his Phædo, pag. 91. Ed. Serrani.

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men, not to be averſe to the belief of a God and a Future State, taken from the advantages of that belief both to virtue and happineſs, even ſuppoſing the caſe to be only probable, or as yet doubtful. And whatever the admirers of this Author may think, there is ſo juſt a foundation in reaſon for this way of arguing, that it will not be the leſs uſed or valued by any conſiderate man, for the unworthy reflection which he has made upon it. And, indeed, to do him right, when he is in a better humour, he himſelf is pleaſed to make uſe of the ſame argument in effect; though put into other words, [in his *Enquiry concerning Virtue*] when he tells us, ^v that *by virtue of the BELIEF of a world to come, a man may retain his Virtue, even under the hardeſt*

Serrani. Λογίζομαι γὰρ ὃ φίλε ἑταῖρε, (¶ Δέσσαι ὡς πλεονεχτικῶς) εἰ μὴ τυγχάνοι ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ ἐγὼ λέγω, καλῶς δὴ ἔχει τὸ περὶ ἡ-
ναι· εἰ δὲ μηδὲν ἐστὶ τελευτήσαντι, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷτόν γε τὸ χρόνον αὐ-
τὸν τὸ παρὰ τὸ θανάτου ἦτον τοῖς παρῆσιν ἀηδὴς ἔσται οὐδ' ὀδυρόμενος,
εἰς. And again, pag. 114. Ἀλλὰ τῶν δὲ ἕνεκα καὶ ὧν διελή-
λυθα μὲν, ὦ Σιμμία, πάντα ποιεῖν, ὥς ἀρετῆς καὶ φρονήσεως ἐν τῷ
βίῳ μεταχειρῶν, καλὸν γὰρ τὸ ἀθλόν, καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς μεγάλη· τοῦ μὲν τῶ-
γα διιχυρῆσθαι ἕτως ἔχειν, ὡς ἐγὼ διελήλυθα, καὶ πρέπει νῦν
ἔχοντι ἀνδρὶ· ὅτι μῦθοι καὶ ταῦτα ἐστὶν ἢ ταῦτ' ἅτλα περὶ τὰς
ψυχὰς ἡμῶν καὶ τὰς οἰκίσεις, ἐπεὶ περ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται
εἶσα, τότε καὶ πρέπειν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεύσαι, οἰομένῳ ἕτως
ἔχειν· καλὸς γὰρ ὁ κίνδυνος, καὶ καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὥσπερ ἐπάδει
ἐμῷ.

^v Pag. 71.

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hardest thoughts of Human nature. And speaking of *Religious Affection*, he says, that ^w if the subject and ground of this divine passion be not really just or adequate, (the Hypothesis of Theism, i. e. the Existence of a God, being supposed false) the passion still in it self is so far natural and good; as it proves an advantage to Virtue and Goodness. But if, on the other side, the subject of this passion be really adequate and just, (the Hypothesis of Theism being real, and not imaginary) then is the passion also just, and becomes absolutely due and requisite in every rational Creature. Now what is this but arguing for *Religious affection*, or the admiration of the Divine order of things, (which he might have called *Faith* if he had pleased) from its ^x advantage to virtue, even though the subject of it should in the end, prove not to have been *real* but *imaginary*? And why may not another man, endeavour to persuade men to live according to Virtue and Religion, from the same Topick, even though it be put into plainer language?

But to conclude; There is no considerate man, but who would willingly be satisfied in

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matters

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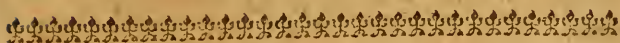
matters of so great moment, as the principles of Religion; and therefore every man ought to take the surest way of attaining that satisfaction, by preparing himself to entertain Truth with a sincere love of it; that is, by living so that no Truth may ever be ungrateful to him. There is a great affinity between Virtue and Truth; and the surest way to find the one, is by the sincere practice of the other. Let us therefore lay aside all passion and prejudice, and every irregular desire, which may hinder us from being impartially willing to obey every reasonable obligation, which the discovery of Truth can lay upon us. And if we are already got so far as in earnest to believe a God, and that the practice of virtue or moral Rectitude is his will, but yet want farther satisfaction as to the Truth of Revelation; let us first *do the will of God* as far as we know, and *then we shall know whether the doctrine be of God.*

And may the Father of Lights, and God of all Truth, direct us all in our sincere endeavours after the knowledge of his Will.



SERMON XI.

Preached *March* the 3^d 17¹⁷.



Isaiah ii. 3.

*And many people shall go, and say,
Come ye, and let us go up to the
mountain of the Lord; to the house
of the God of Jacob, and he will
teach us of his ways, and we will
walk in his paths; for out of Zion
shall go forth the law, and the word
of the Lord from Jerusalem.*



IN my last Discourse, I took occasion from these words to consider;

I. That every Rational man, who believes a God and a Providence governing the world, is under a natural obligation, to enquire whether God has made any particular Revelation of his will to men, which they are any way concerned to take notice of.

I shall now proceed to consider the second thing, which I then proposed to speak to, *viz.*

II. That whoever seriously makes this enquiry, will find good reason to conclude, that some Revelation may justly be expected from God, considering the general state of mankind.

This is a point which deserves to be very seriously considered, because it is the very point, upon which all those who can be truly called *Deists*, begin to divide from such as believe a divine Revelation. For he that believes a God and a Providence governing the world, and observing the actions of men, as every one must do that can properly be called a *Deist*, and yet denies the Truth of all Revelation, must of necessity, either hold it unreasonable either to believe or expect any such

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such Revelation at all from God, upon any account; or else he must imagine, that there may hereafter be some true Revelation, though all that have hitherto been pretended to, be false. As to this latter case, I think there will be no occasion to say any thing; because, I believe, there are none of those, who deny the Truth and certainty of all past Revelation, who do in earnest believe it probable, that there ever will be any other: Or if there should be any such persons, the course of those Arguments, which are generally used to prove the Truth and excellency of the Christian Religion, will plainly shew them their mistake, by letting them see, how unreasonable it is to expect greater evidence in this world for any possible future Revelation, than what we already have for the Christian.

My business therefore at present, is only with those men, who profess neither to believe nor expect, any other Revelation of the will of God to mankind, besides what the ordinary course of his Providence, in the outward government of the world, discovers to every man's mind, but think such belief or expectation unreasonable: Now they that are of this opinion, must either think, that it is impossible, in the nature of things, that God should

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make any such Revelation, or, at least, that it is highly improbable that he ever does make any; or else, that mankind has no occasion or necessity for any such Revelation, and therefore need never enquire after it.

In opposition, therefore, to this kind of reasoning, I shall endeavour to shew;

1. That in the nature of things, there is no *impossibility* that God should make a particular Revelation of his will to men.

2. That, considering our natural notions of the Goodness of God, there is no reason to think it *incredible* that he should, at some time or other, make such Revelation.

3. That considering the general condition of mankind, such revelation is by no means *unnecessary*.

1. That in the nature of things, there is no *impossibility* that God should make a particular Revelation of his will to men. They that deny the possibility of it, ought to shew that it implies some contradiction, arising from the consideration, either of the nature of Man, to whom such revelation is supposed to be made, or of God, who is supposed to make it: For otherwise, the mere difficulty of conceiving the manner how it is made, or our not seeing it often done, so as to make it common or familiar

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miliar to us, is no objection to the possibility of it. But now, that God should upon some occasions communicate his will to men in a particular manner, implies nothing contradictory, either to the nature of man or God. For if we believe, that God is the maker of mankind, and that from him they received their reason and understanding, with all the powers and faculties of their mind, and all other powers whatsoever, whereby they are capable, either of communicating their thoughts and intentions one to another, or of receiving such communication one from another, notwithstanding that the Agent or mind, thus communicating its thoughts, is it self invisible; then it is unreasonable to suppose, that the mind of man is incapable of receiving any impression, of revelation or instruction, from the Supreme mind, only because that Supreme mind is of an invisible nature. And it is yet much more unreasonable, to suppose any incapacity in the divine Being, of making such discovery of his will to the mind of man, as his wisdom sees fit; for this would, in effect, be to deny the perfection of his nature, and to make him a Being not acting freely but by necessity, without liberty or choice: and this in the end comes to the same thing, as deny-

ing him to be an intelligent Being^a, and must at last recur to downright Atheism. For, indeed, what difference is there between denying the Existence of God, and denying those Attributes, which are essential to an infinitely wise and powerful Being; whereby though the name of God be retained, yet the nature of an infinitely perfect Being, intended by that name, is infinitely confounded and lost. But I suppose those, with whom I am now discoursing, willingly to own more than the mere name of a *Deity*; and therefore may desire them to consider, the absurdity which would follow, from the denying a possibility of his discovering his will to mankind, whatever the occasion be, in any supernatural way, not inconsistent with his infinite Perfections; or moral Attributes. Indeed, that the divine Majesty or Essence of God should, at any time, be seen by mortal eyes, implies a contradiction to his Nature; because it would suppose him to be Finite, and limited to a particular Figure and place, at the same time that we own him to be Infinite, and every where present, that is, without Figure. But then,

that

^a See Dr. Clarke's *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. Propos. viii, and ix.

that he who is every where present, and works all things *according to the Counsel of his own will*, doing whatever *he pleases*, both in *heaven and earth*, should have no means of discovering his Will to intelligent creatures, whom he has made capable of understanding the mind and will of each other, is a thing utterly repugnant to any just and consistent notion of his infinite Power. What the Psalmist says^b, *He that planted the Ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the Eye, shall he not see? he that chastiseth the Heathen, shall he not be correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?* carries in it a natural argument, which may be extended to the case we are now upon. He that hath given to man, not only the use of *Senses*, whereby he is able to perceive outward objects, but also an inward *Understanding*, whereby he is capable of apprehending such things as are not objects of sense, has not he power to convey any knowledge from himself to that understanding, but only by such means as we prescribe to him? and is he not able to convince the mind of man as effectually, of the Truth of what is conveyed to it, in an extraordinary way,

^b Psalm. 94. 10.

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way, as it can be convinc'd of any other truth of things that are without itself?

But I need not insist longer upon the possibility of a thing, which the generality of mankind in all ages have, not only owned to be possible, but which they have also, as I shall shew by and by, acknowledged in fact actually to be. And therefore I proceed to observe.

2. That, considering our natural notions of the goodness of God, there is no reason to think it *incredible*, that he should at some time or other make such discovery of his will. I would not here be so understood, as if I thought that we could justly conceive God Almighty to be under any obligation to make such particular Revelation to men: because considering the ungrateful returns and the unworthy use which the generality of men have too commonly made of that natural Light which God affords to all, they have no reason to expect any supernatural Revelation as matter of Right: yet considering the infinite Goodness of the Divine Being, so many ways express'd towards them beyond their deserts, they may have ground to hope for it from his mercy, and to believe that the thing is not improbable: especially when we consider,
That

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That in all ages of the world men have ever had such an apprehension. Now it is certainly more agreeable to the goodness of God to suppose, that there is really at the bottom some foundation for such an apprehension, than to think that mankind should always be under such a delusion, as constantly to believe and expect a thing for which there never was any ground or occasion given. That men should mistake in making false deductions from a true principle, or that they should ground many errors, one after another, upon one Truth misapprehended or corrupted, is not to be wondred at; for it is a common thing. But that they should generally, in all ages and countries, fall into the belief of a thing, upon which so much of their practical conduct depends, and yet that there should never, in any age or country, have been any probability of fact or reason to induce them to it, is a thing that can hardly be reconciled with common sense to suppose.

Now that, in all ages and countries, there has been, time out of mind, a common persuasion, that God did communicate his will to mankind, in some way or other more than the general way of nature, is a thing so notorious in all antiquity, that I think no one will

will go about to deny it: And the farther we go backwards towards the most ancient times, still so much the more strong and prevailing was that persuasion. *Tully*, in his preface to those Treatises, wherein he endeavours to set in the best light, not only all that could be said for, but also all that could be said against the several sorts of *Divination* or Prophecy, which were pretended to among the Heathen; tells us, ^c *That it was a constant and prevailing opinion, derived down from the remotest antiquity, or first ages of the world, and confirmed by the unanimous suffrage of all nations,* ^d as well those which were most learned and polite, as those which were most rude and barbarous; *That there was among men such a thing as Prophecy*, or foreknowledge and prediction of future contingent events. And he gives it as his opinion, ^e that
the

^c Vetus opinio est, jam usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque & populi Rom. & omnium gentium firmata consensu, versari quandam inter homines divinationem quam *Græci* *μαντικὴ* appellant, id est, præsentionem & scientiam rerum futurarum, &c. *Cic. de Divinat. lib. i.*

^d Gentem quidem nullam video neque tam humanam atque doctam, neque tam immanem, tamque barbaram, quæ non significari futura, & à quibusdam intelligi prædicique posse censeat, *ib.*

^e Atque hæc, ut ego arbitror, veteres rerum magis eventis moniti quam ratione docti putaverunt & probaverunt, *ib.*

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the ancients came into this persuasion, not so much by reason and argument, as by evidence of fact and experience. That is, they were convinced by the events of things which had been foretold, that the Divine Being did sometimes communicate the knowledge of things future, which could not otherwise have been naturally known to men. And though the immediate conveyance of this foreknowledge was by them supposed to be made to men by Powers inferior to the Supreme Deity, yet they owned, that ultimately those Powers derived their knowledge of futurity from the *Supreme*; as appears from that passage of the *Poet.* ^f

*Quæ Phæbo Pater Omnipotens, mihi Phæ-
bus Apollo
Prædixit* — ^g

And upon this persuasion they all had recourse to Oracles in difficult cases, as is sufficiently known to all that have any manner of acquaintance with ancient History. And that they did not think the mere foretelling of future events was all the Revelation, which they

^f *Virg. Æneid. lib. 3. v. 251.*

^g *Upon which Servius has this remark, Simul notandum, Apollinem, quæ dicit, ab Jove cognoscere.*

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they might expect from God, is evident from hence, That there never yet was any nation but what had some sort of revealed Religion, real or pretended among them, which gave them some direction about their worship or intercourse with the Heavenly Powers^h: and that they generally believed the first Founders of Kingdoms and Commonwealths, to have received some kind of Instruction from the Gods, for the future establishment of their Government and Laws, especially in matters of Religion and Divine Worship. From hence it was that *Numa Pompilius*, in the settling of his Laws for the *Roman* state, pretended to have frequent conferences with the Goddess *Egeria*,† and to receive directions from her: And that ⁱ*Lycurgus*, during the time that he was establishing the *Lacedæmonian* Laws

^h Καὶ οἱ γε ἀρχαῖοι τὸ πρὸς τῶν Θεῶν ἐπρέσβυον μάλλον καὶ ἐσέμνυνον· καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου ὁ χρηστὴρ ἐξομνύειν ἦν τότε πολὺς. &c. *Strabo. lib. 16. 762.*

† ——— Deorum metum injiciendum ratus est, qui cum descendere ad animos sine aliquo commento miraculi non posset, simulat sibi cum Dea *Egeria* congressus nocturnos esse, ejus se monitu, quæ acceptissima Dīs essent, sacra instituire. *Liv. lib. 1. cap. 19.*

ⁱ Τὰ δ' ὅμοια ἐποίησεν καὶ Λυκῆργος ὁ ζηλωτὴς αὐτῷ (sc. *Minois*) πυκνὰ γὰρ ὡς εἰσὶν ἀποδημῶν, ἐπειθάνειν πρὸς τὴν πωθείας αὐτοῦ προσήκει πρὸς γένειν τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις. *Strabo. lib. xvi. p. 762.*

Leges

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Laws and Government, made frequent journeys to consult the *Pythian* Oracle. Herein these two famous Lawgivers imitated the method which was reported to have been taken long before by *Minos* King of *Crete*, who was celebrated by the Ancients for the justice of his Government and the excellence of his Laws, for the making and perfecting of which he is said to have had several conferences with *Jupiter*, and for that purpose to have gone every Ninth^k Year into *Jupiter's* Cave to receive his Instructions, and to give an account of what had been done in the former nine years, (according to ¹*Plato's* account of the Tradition, who expounds the passages of *Homer* and *Hesiod*, in which this matter is mentioned to the same purpose in his Dialogue which bears the name of *Minos*.) By this practice

Leges suas auctoritate Apollinis Delphici confirmavit, *Cic. de Divinat. lib. 1.*

^k Not for nine years together, as some mistake it, who do not consider the passage of *Plato*.

¹ Τῷτο γὰρ σημαίνει τὸ ἔπειτα, (*Hom. Od. τ'. Ὑ. 179.*)

Ἐνέαρξ βασιλεὺς Διὸς μεγάλῃ δαριδῇ,
σωκιστῆς τῷ Διὶ εἶναι τὸ Μίνω· οἱ γὰρ ὅσοι λόγοι εἰσὶ· καὶ ὁ
δαριδῇ σωκιστῆς ἐστὶν ἐν λόγοις· ἐφοῖτα ἔνδι ἐνάτῃ ἔτος εἰς τὸ
τῷ Διὶ ἀνελθόντῃ Μίνω, τὰ μὲν μαθησόμενον, τὰ δὲ ἀποδεχόμενον
τῇ προτέρᾳ ἐναετησίᾳ (ἐμεμαθήκει) ὡς τῷ Διὶ. *Plato in Minos, pag. 319. ed. Steph.*

practice he reformed whatever was amiss, so that the Laws of *Crete* continued in great reputation for many years after.^m Insomuch that those of *Sparta*, under which the *Lacedaemonians* flourished so long; were very much copied from them. And it is observed by *Plato*, that those two kingdoms of *Crete* and *Sparta* were the only ones in all *Greece*; that kept from gaming and drinking to excess; which he affirms was chiefly owing to the good institutions of this *Minos*: whose Memory was had in such veneration, that the ancient Poets have, for his Justice and good Government, made him one of the Judges of the dead in the other world; as they have also made *Rhadamanthus* another, who (according to ⁿ *Plato*) was a sort of Chief Justice to *Minos*, in the administration of his Government in *Crete*.^o Though *Strabo* (out of *Ephorus*, an old Historian) tells us, ^p that there was another *Rhadamanthus* long before this, who first civilized the Island; and took the same method of consulting with *Jupiter*, which

^m Vide Strabonem, lib. x. pag. 477.

ⁿ *Plato*. ib. pag. 320.

^o *Rhadamanthus* is called the Brother of *Minos* in *Plato's* first Book de Legibus, p. 623.

^p *Strabo* lib. x. pag. 476.

which *Minos* afterwards copied from him. That these, and the like relations of ancient times, which we meet withal in Heathen Authors, have a great mixture of fable in them I readily grant; but that which made them so easily obtain credit in the world, was this general persuasion, that such laws and government as were most under the Divine direction, must of necessity be most perfect, and that God did, some way or other, communicate such express directions to Good men. What *Strabo*, a judicious Author, remarks upon this occasion, is worth our observation; ⁹ *Whatever, says he, becomes of the real Truth of these relations, this however is certain, that men did believe and think them true; and for this reason, Prophets were had in such honour, as to be thought worthy sometimes even of Royal dignity, as being persons that delivered precepts and admonitions from the Gods, both while they lived, and after their death, such as Tiresias, Amphiaraus, Trophonius, Orpheus, Musæus, &c.* It is certain, that

Z. some

⁹ Ταῦτα γὰρ ὅπως ποτὲ ἀληθείας ἔχει, παρὰ γὰρ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐπιπίστευτο καὶ ἐνεόμιστο, καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου οἱ μάντις ἐτιμῶντο, ὥστε καὶ βασιλείας ἀξιοῦσθαι, ὡς τὰ παρὰ τῶν Θεῶν ἡμῖν ἐκφέρουσι παρρηγέματα, καὶ ἐπαγορεύματα καὶ ζῶντες, καὶ ἀποθανόντες, κατὰ πῆρ καὶ Τυρρεσίας. &c. *Strabo. lib. 16. pag. 762.*

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some of these Oracles continued long in reputation to after ages; and were frequently applied to by persons of the highest rank, and best understanding.

I know there are some who now make it a great Controversy, whether there ever was any real true prediction delivered by these, or any other Oracles among the Heathen: and some go so far as to assert, that they were all entirely cheat and collusion, managed by the artifice of crafty and designing men. And no doubt there was a great deal of human fraud in them; so that in very many cases, we need not look for any other solution for those appearances, by which the vulgar were deluded. But yet any one, who carefully considers, what account the very best, and least credulous of ancient writers give of them, will find it very difficult to prove, that never any other agents but human, had any concern in them. There are some such express predictions related, as cannot well, with any modesty, be denied to have been made; nor is it so easy to account for them in the way of human Artifice, as it is to shew, how they might, by wicked Spirits, have been collected from the true Oracles of God, and then delivered as their own, to gain credit to that Idolatrous worship

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worship of wicked Spirits, into which, by the just judgment of God, those nations were fallen, which had departed from the worship of the one true God. Nor is it easy to account for what both *Plato* and *Xenophon*, two intimate acquaintance of *Socrates*, so particularly and expressly relate, concerning that *Genius* or *Dæmon*, which gave that good man such frequent and remarkable advertisements, to restrain him from any design, whereby he was likely to fall into any mistake or danger.

However; it is not necessary to my present purpose, to enter so far into this Controversy; as to determine the matter either way; for let all that was pretended to by these Oracles be never so much a cheat, yet there must have been originally some ground of truth to build all his cheat upon; and the stronger and more lasting the cheat or counterfeit was, so much the stronger must the persuasion at first have been, of some real and true Revelation made from God. For no counterfeit is ever attempted, or can ever hope to meet with entertainment and success, but because it pretends to imitate something which has been true in a like kind before, and owned to be so. If there had never been any real and true Coin, there never would have been any false or counterfeit.

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Errors may proceed and multiply from the corruption of any Truth, but Truth is always the oldest. The First writings of the Old Testament, may be proved, beyond dispute, to be older than any other books now extant in the world. And in those writings we have an account of very remarkable Revelations made to the ancient *Patriarchs*, who were very considerable men in their several generations long before; some of which, no doubt, were remember'd long after. The wonderful prediction which *Joseph* made, concerning seven years of great plenty, succeeded by seven others of great famine, which had so great an influence over the whole government of *Egypt*, and caused so great a change of property among them, could not easily be forgotten in some ages. And the whole History of the life and actions of *Moses* the great *Hebrew* law-giver, the Miracles which he wrought, and the Revelations which he received from God, and the Government which he established upon them, over his own people, whom he delivered safe out of *Egypt*, in spite of the strongest and most powerful opposition of their oppressors, were things so remarkable, that the *Egyptians*, and other neighbouring nations, had great reason to be well acquainted with
them:

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them: and from them these notions might be very easily propagated by degrees into other parts of the world. And other founders of Commonwealths might take hints from thence, to pretend to such extraordinary ways of receiving their laws and institutions from heaven, as long as any tradition of the first Truth remain'd. And I am the rather induced to observe this, from the account which *Strabo* himself, in the fore-mentioned place ^r, gives of this Matter. For first, he gives a much more ingenuous Character, than *Tacitus* does, both of *Moses* and the ancient *Jewish* people: and being an *Asiatic*, he had opportunity of being better informed of their Original: and with a great deal of candour, he relates the occasion of *Moses's* conducting *them out of Egypt* ^t, upon a great dislike of the Egyptian Idolatry, and of his settling a good form of Political government, and an excellent scheme of Religious worship ^u, upon the belief of one God

Z 3

among

^r Lib. xvi. pag. 761.

^t Ἀπῆρεν ἐκεῖσε ἐνθένδε θυχερῶνας τὰ καθεστῶτα· καὶ σωεξήρα· αὐτῷ πολλοὶ τιμῶνες τὸ Θεῖον. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἐκείνῳ καὶ ἐδίδαξεν, ὡς ὅτε ὁρθῶς φρονησιν οἱ Αἰγύπιοι θεοῖσι εἰκάζοντες καὶ βοσκήμασι τὸ Θεῖον. &c.

^u Τίτῳ δὲ τίς ἂν εἰκόνα πλάττειν θαρρήσειε νῦν ἔχον ὁμοίαν τινὶ τῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν· ἀλλ' ἐὰν δεῖ πάσαν ξοανοποιῖαν—

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among them, free from image worship and superstition; and of his promising to those who continued virtuous and religious observers of justice,^v *all future good, and extraordinary or miraculous assistance from God, but no such thing to those who were not such.* He takes notice also,^w that Religion and the Divine providence, were the defence that *Moses* took for his armour, when he was in quest of a place of settlement for this excellent form of religious worship. And he adds, ^x that those who succeeded *Moses* for some time, while they kept to this first institution, were very just, and truly religious men. And, which is very remarkable, after the giving this account of *Moses*, and his Divine polity, he takes occasion to mention *Minos* and *Lycurgus*, and others, who pretended to a divine direction for their Institutions also, as if he intended thereby to lead us into an opinion, that they did but copy after this older and more excellent Legislator.

And

^v Καὶ προσδοκᾶν δεῖν ἅπασι τῷ Θεῷ καὶ δῶρον αἰεὶ τι καὶ σημεῖον αὐτῷ σωφρονέως ζῶντας καὶ μετ' ἀδικαιοσύνης, τὰς δ' ἄλλας μὴ προσδοκᾶν.

^w Ἀμα δ' ἀντὶ τῶ ὅπλων τὰ ἱερὰ πρὸς ἀνάγκην καὶ τὸ Θεῶν, ἰδρυσιν τάττα ζητεῖν ἀξιῶν. *Εἰς.*

^x Οἱ δὲ διαδεχόμενοι χρόνος μὴ τινας ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς διέμειναν διὰ κακοπραγίας καὶ θεοσεβείας ὡς ἀληθῶς ὄντες.

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And besides all this, if we consider the scattered remains of ancient Tradition, which are to be found dispersed among the old accounts of Heathen nations, though greatly corrupted by passing through so many hands, and strip them of that fabulous dress, into which poets and other writers have put them, we may see manifest footsteps of many ancient Truths of Religion, whereof we have a more plain and simple, as well as more consistent narration, in the books of *Moses* and other sacred writings. I shall not mention particulars, because many Christian writers, both ancient and modern, in their defences of the Divine authority of the Christian Religion, are very copious upon this subject. And all the modestest of the Heathen writers themselves confess, that their first Learning and Philosophy, and many of their Religious Doctrines, were originally derived from the *Egyptians*, or other more eastern *Barbarous* nations, that is, from those who were more ancient than the *Greeks*. And if they had borrowed less from the *Egyptians*, who had been longer corrupting Original Truth; and more from others, who had less superstition among them, we might have had a clearer account of the most primitive persuasions of men, in matters of Religion.

Now the Use which I would make of all this is, to shew, that mankind have generally been persuaded, that God did really, upon great occasions, reveal his will to men, in some particular manner or other (which they supposed there were several ways of doing) for their better instruction in matters of Virtue and Religion. And since they have ever, from the very infancy of the world, as far as we can judge, been possess'd of this opinion, it seems most agreeable to our notions of the Divine Goodness, that such an opinion should not always have been mere delusion : but that there should both be some real foundation for it, and some excellent use to be, some time or other, made of it.

But because there are some who pretend, that the natural light of our own Reason is entirely sufficient to direct us, in our moral and religious conduct, without any other assistance, so that any other Revelation or direction from God seems to them altogether needless ; I shall therefore now proceed to shew,

3. That considering the general condition of mankind, such Revelation is by no means unnecessary. Indeed if the generality of mankind had always lived up exactly to the principles of reason, and had all of them both
leisure

leisure and capacity sufficient to improve their natural Light to the utmost, and were always ready, in every instance, to practise according to the just consequences deducible from such improvement; then there might be some pretence for thinking any farther assistance or revelation unnecessary. But as the case stands, the matter is quite otherwise, as will appear from several considerations. For

First, It is evident, that there is a strange and surprizing corruption in human Nature; that the generality of men have hardly ever attended duly, at any time, to the natural dictates of their own reason; and none, even of those who attended most to them, have yet ever done it so constantly, as not to be conscious that they have often deviated from what they knew to be reasonable in many instances. But much the greater part have shewn themselves more prone to extinguish than to improve the light of Reason. And yet all pretend to it, and all, upon some occasion or other, make use of it, and appeal to it. There is an unaccountable mixture of contrarieties in the nature of man as it now stands; the seeds of something so very great and noble in his Reasoning Faculty, and at the same time something so very weak and dis-

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disorderly in his general use of it, that the most inquisitive men have been greatly puzzled to give a true and satisfactory solution of it. There is a very lively description of this distemper or sickness of the mind of man in *Tully's* Preface to his 3^d Book of *Tusculan Questions*, wherein he tells us, that *⁊ if Nature had made us in such a manner, that we could have had a clear and distinct view of her, and have constantly followed her excellent direction, then we should not so much have wanted any farther advice or teaching. But now she has afforded us only some small sparks of true Reason, which by corrupt practice and perverse opinions we so smother, that the true and uncorrupt light of Nature no where appears in its full strength.* I might cite many passages of other Heathen Authors to the same purpose. But such acknowledgements are frequently to be met withal, and I need not insist upon them. They could plainly see, that the state of man

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⁊ Quod si tales nos natura genuisset, ut eam ipsam intueri & perspicere, eademque optima duce cursum vitæ conficere possemus: haud erat sane quod quisquam rationem ac doctrinam requireret. Nunc parvulos nobis dedit igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus, opinionibusque depravati sic restinguimus ut *Nusquam Natura Lumen appareat.*

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in this world was very far from being perfect or natural; but how he first came into this condition, was a question that could not be clearly resolved without farther light than their own^z. They could see that there were natural seeds of virtue in the minds of men, and that the immediate cause of choking those seeds and hindring their growth, was wrong education, depraved custom, perverse opinions early imbibed, love of pleasure, ambition, covetousness, and the like. These were indeed the immediate impediments to the attainment of Virtue, and that happy life, which nature directed to and aspired after. But these are the disorders of Nature in her distempered condition: The original cause of which they could not of themselves find out: and until they knew the cause of the distemper, they must always be at a loss, how to find a proper means of recovering out of it. Here therefore a Revelation was necessary to shew men their true condition. But

2. Suppose

^z Sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum, quæ si adolescere liceret, ipsa nos ad beatam vitam natura perduceret. Nunc autem simul atque editi in lucem & suscepti sumus, in omni continuo pravitate, & in summa opinionum perversitate versamur, &c. *Cic. ibid.*

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2. Suppose they had really known the true state of their own case, yet the true cure for it was more than human power or skill could effect. Some of them had recourse to Philosophy. But the disease was too inveterate, and too epidemical to be cured by so weak a medicine. The Philosophers themselves were many of them as far from being amended by their own prescriptions as any other: few of them but what had some remarkable defect, either in their Principles or Practices of Natural Morality, as whoever reads the History of their Lives and Opinions may easily see; and the most ingenuous of them confess it. *Tully owns, that very few of them formed their own minds and manners according to the dictates of true Reason, and that their several Institutions were more an ostentation of their knowledge than a rule of their lives.* And their Scholars, according to ^b *Aristotle's* account,

^a Quotus enim quisque Philosophorum invenitur: qui sit ita moratus, ita animo ac vita constitutus, ut ratio postulat? qui disciplinam suam non ostentationem scientiæ, sed legem vitæ putet. *Cic. Tuscul. l. 2. cap. 4.*

^b Ἄλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ ταῦτα μὴ ἐπράττειν, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸ λόγον καταφύγοντες οἷον φιλοσοφεῖν, καὶ ἕτας ἑσχατὰ παρδαῖοι, ὁμοίον τι ποιῶντες τοῖς κάμουσιν, οἱ δὲ ἰατρῶν ἀκέραι μὲν ἐπιμελῶς, ποιῶσι δ' ἔθεν τὸ παρατηρομένων, &c. *Arist. Ethic. Nicom. lib. 2. cap. 4. in fine.*

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account, *learn'd only to discourse about Morality, but were no more better'd by it, than a sick man would be by hearing the discourses of a Physician, but never using any of his prescriptions.* But some of them we may suppose were good and sincere men: yet had they been really better than they were, their numbers were so few, and their authority so weak, and the general corruption of the world so great, that they could never hope to make any considerable reformation in the manners of men. And some of the best of them did so far despair of any such effect from mere human endeavours, that they thought it best to sit quiet, and if they could keep themselves free from the contagion of that wickedness, with which the world about them was overwhelmed, it would be enough. And if any did attempt farther, they made but few converts. And their influence, in a great measure died with them. So that here is no remedy to be expected, but only for a very few particular persons out of the great body of mankind from the assistance of Philosophy. And yet this is what some modern Deists think, sufficient to supersede the necessity of all Revelation, as if here and there a man of much leisure, and great abilities, and good disposition,

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tion, were all that the Divine Goodness should be supposed to have any concern for. But such notions are very unworthy of God, who is no Respector of Persons. Let it therefore be farther considered,

3. That supposing the Philosophers had been really designed to reform the Morals and Religion of Mankind, they were not sufficiently qualified for such an undertaking, because they themselves were ignorant of many things necessary for it. As they knew not the first cause of the corruption of humane Nature (which I mentioned before) so they could know nothing of God's design in suffering it, nor of the Scheme and Order of his Providence, by which he designed to conduct mankind out of it, into a more perfect and happy state than that from which they had fallen. Though they were upon good grounds of Reason (while they kept steady to it) convinc'd of some of those great Truths, which are strong motives to obedience to the Law of Nature (such as the *Immortality of the Soul* and a *Future State* of Rewards and Punishments:) Yet their conviction was not so steady and uniform as was necessary to persuade others. And it may be questioned, whether their unsteadiness to their own arguments, and
their

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their contradictory opinions, and different sects; formed upon them, did not more hinder than help, that influence which the traditional belief of these primitive Truths had upon the vulgar, in more early times, before they had ever heard such disputing upon them. So that there was really more want of Revelation after the days of Philosophy than before. What they discoursed upon these subjects, was too subtle and speculative, rather amusing than instructing to a common understanding. And besides, they themselves had no consistent Scheme to proceed upon. Tho' they could plainly discover, from the reason of things, that Virtue was necessary to the perfection of man, yet their many divisions and subdivisions upon the Chief Good, or Supreme and Ultimate Happiness of man, were a great hindrance to any good influence upon those that heard them. They could many of them speak very well, both upon the excellence of a virtuous life in general, and of the immediate advantage of several particular virtues, and their natural tendency to the good of mankind; but how to reduce them all to one consistent scheme, so that ordinary men might see the obligation to practise all of them, in all circumstances,

was

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was a thing that few, or none of them, could attain to.

There are, besides these, divers other considerations, which shew the necessity of a Revelation from God, in order to the effectual reformation of mankind, both as to Religion and Morality, which I shall have occasion to mention in my next discourse: when I shall likewise proceed to shew, that if Revelation be a thing neither improbable nor unnecessary, it ought to be our main concern to endeavour to know, where this true Revelation is to be found.

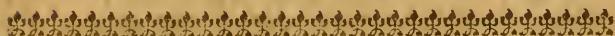


SERMON



S E R M O N XII.

Preached *April* the 7th 1718.



Isaiah ii. 3.

*And many people shall go, and say,
Come ye, and let us go up to the
mountain of the Lord, to the house
of the God of Jacob, and he will
teach us of his ways, and we will
walk in his paths; for out of Zion
shall go forth the law, and the word
of the Lord from Jerusalem.*



Have, in my two last Discourses,
endeavoured to shew,

I. That every rational man, who
believes a God and a Providence governing the

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world,

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world, is under a natural obligation, to enquire whether God has made any particular Revelation of his will to men, which they are any way concerned to take notice of. And likewise,

II. That whoever seriously makes this enquiry, will find good reason to conclude, that some Revelation may justly be expected to come from God, considering the general state and condition of mankind. And in speaking to this second consideration, I observed,

1. That in the nature of things, there is no *impossibility* that God should make a particular Revelation of his will to men.

2. That, considering our natural notions of the Goodness of God to mankind, there is no reason to think it *incredible* that he should, at some time or other, make such Revelation. And

3. That considering the general condition of mankind, such revelation is by no means *unnecessary*; as some despisers of all Revelation have thought fit to represent it. This I began to shew from such considerations as these.

1. That there is a strange and surprizing
corrup-

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corruption in Human Nature, which the wisest men could both see in others and experience in themselves, but which they were wonderfully puzzled to give any tolerable account of: and not knowing the original cause of it, they must always necessarily be at a loss, how to find a sufficient means of recovering out of it. And

2. Suppose they had really known the true state of their own case, yet the effectual cure for it was more than mere human power or skill could attain to. Philosophy, how much soever it may be magnified, was not a sufficient cure even for those that profess'd it, who were at least but a small handful of men, and very unequal to such a vast undertaking, as instructing and reforming the Morals and Religion of mankind. And

3. If they had really intended such a thing, which few or none of them ever did, yet they were not qualified for such a work. They neither had so steady a conviction of the truth, of what themselves profess'd, nor were their notions of several necessary Truths so consistent with one another, as ever to be likely to have any great influence upon others. To these considerations I shall now add,

4. That in matters of Religion, which na-

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turally have the greatest influence over the mind of man, and which therefore ought to be under the best and truest direction of all others, they were still more deficient, than in any thing else. When mankind had once generally fallen from the worship of the one true God, they sunk, by degrees, into the most brutal Superstition and Idolatry; which was accompanied with such an universal blindness and stupidity, as to the true Nature of God and his Attributes; that if some notion of God's Existence had not been so deeply rooted in human Nature, as never to be wholly destroyed, a general Atheism must have been the natural consequence of such monstrous practices. For as we find no ancient account of any that profess'd Atheistical Principles, till Religion was so entirely degenerated from its first Original, that Primitive Truth and established Falshood could not easily be distinguished; so after things were come to this pass, we find several pretenders to utter infidelity. Now the Philosophers were so far from being able to make any considerable reformation in this matter, that, generally speaking, they made the case much worse; not only by suffering themselves to be drawn away by the stream of vulgar Superstition,

stitution, and complying with every establish'd idolatrous practice, but likewise by endeavouring to find out some distinction or other to justify it, or at least to excuse themselves in complying with it. If they could not apply some symbolical meaning or other to the most absurd and ridiculous ceremonies of their gross superstition, by which they might seem to reconcile it to something that look'd like Natural Religion, yet however they defended them by the law and practice of the country where they lived. Thus not only the ordinary ^a Scholars of *Pythagoras*, but even such men as ^b *Plato*, ^c *Cicero*, ^d *Epictetus*, and

A a 3

others

^a Ἀθαιάτις μὲν πρῶτα Θεὸς, νόμῳ ὡς ἀλάκεν),
 Τίμα, καὶ σέβει ὄρεον· ἔπειθ' ἤρωας ἀγαυὸς.
 Τὸς τε καὶ χθονίους σέβει δαίμονας ἔννομα ῥέζων.

Pythag. Aurea Carm.

^b Πρῶτον μὲν φημὲν τιμὰς τὰς μετ' Ὀλυμπίους τε καὶ τὴν τῶν
 πόλιν ἔχοντας Θεὸς, τοῖς χθονίοις ἂν τις θεοῖς ἄξια καὶ δούτερος καὶ
 ἀξιόεστος νέμων, ὁρβόταλα τῷ τ' ὀυσεβείας σκοπῇ τυγχάνοι· τοῖς δὲ
 τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὰ περὶ τὰ καὶ ἀντίφωνα τοῖς ἐμπροσθεν ῥηθεῖσι νῦν
 δὴ· μὲν θεὸς ὅς τις δὲ, καὶ τοῖς δαίμοσιν ὅγ' ἐμφραν ὀργιάζουσιν ἂν·
 ἤρωσι δὲ μὲν τῶν τῶν· ἐπακολουθεῖ δ' αὐτοῖς ἰδρύματα ἴδια πατρῶων
 Θεῶν καὶ νόμον ὀργιαζόμενα. *Plato de Leg. lib. 4. pag. 717.*
which words are an encouragement both to publick and dome-
sick Superstition and Idolatry

^c Constructa à patribus delubra habento; lucos in agris
 habento, & Larum sedes: ritus familiæ, patrumque ser-
 vanto.

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others of the most eminent understanding among them, such as in many places, on other occasions, express'd very noble and sublime sentiments, both of Morality and Religion, yet give such precepts for following the received customs, both in the manner and object of Divine Worship, as could not but greatly confirm all other less discerning men in any kind of Idolatry, which had but been long enough practis'd to plead prescription in their several countries.

The *Stoics*, who valued themselves upon the strictness of their Religious, as well as Moral Principles, by Deifying of *Nature* or the *Universe* and the several parts even of the material world, were great encouragers of Polytheism and Creature Worship; and by ascribing the incommunicable name of God to any thing, that was but the immediate instrument

vanto : Divos & eos, qui cælestes semper habiti, colunto,
 —Cic. de Legg. lib. 2.

Sacra privata perpetua manento. Deorum manium jura sancta sunt. *ib.*

Jam illud ex institutis Pontificum & Aruspicum non mutandum est, quibus hostiis immolandum cuique Deo, &c. *ib.*
where may be seen much more to the same purpose, which he prescribes in the way of a perpetual Establishment.

δ Στένειν ἢ καὶ θύειν καὶ ἀπαρχαῖς καὶ τὰ πάτρια, (ἐκαστοῖς) ἐκαστοῖς πεποιήκει, &c. *Epiſt. cap. 38.*

strument of any considerable benefit to the life of man, they justified the practice of those *who* (in St. Paul's language) *changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the Creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.* And thus by refining upon the *Mythological* or *Poetical Theology* of their predecessors, they were so far from correcting the prevailing errors of Heathen Worship, that they rather added greater authority to the corruptions of it. Thus *Balbus*, in *Tully*, commends the wisdom of the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans*, for multiplying the number of their Gods by Deifying almost every thing that was of great virtue or benefit to mankind: And likewise for giving Divine Worship to dead men, who had been eminent in former times, such as

A a 4

Hercules

^e Multæ autem aliæ Naturæ Deorum ex magnis beneficiis eorum, non sine causa, & à Gratiæ Sapientissimis & à majoribus nostris constitutæ nominatæque sunt. Quicquid enim magnam utilitatem generi afferret Humano, id non sine Divina Bonitate erga homines fieri arbitrabantur. Itaque tum illud quod erat à Deo natum (i. donatum) nomine ipsius Dei nuncupabant——Tum autem res ipsa in qua vis inest major aliqua sic appellatur ut ea ipsa res nominetur Deus.——Utilitatum igitur magnitudine constituti sunt ij Dii qui utilitates quasque gigneant, — *De Nat. Deor. l. 2. cap. 23.*

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Hercules and *Romulus*, and others, ^f because they were now become Immortal. And though he seems, in some measure, to condemn the vulgar Superstition of great folly and credulity, ^g because from this Physical or Natural Theology, and the Deifying of deceased Heroes, they had taken occasion, not only to introduce a multitude of fictitious Gods, which produced many fabulous and superstitious opinions among them; but likewise, by degrees, to ascribe all sorts of human passions and vices to their Gods; yet he concludes, that, setting such fables aside, the Divinity, which pervades through all nature, might be taken for several Gods in the several parts of it, and ought to be worship'd as such. *Sed tamen his fabulis spretis ac repudiatis, Deus pertinens per Naturam cujusque rei, per Terras Ceres, per Maria Neptunus, alii per alia,*

^f Quorum cum remanerent animi atque æternitate fruerentur, Dii rite sunt habiti, cum & optimi essent & æterni. *ib. cap. 24.*

^g Videtisne igitur ut à Physicis rebus, bene atque utiliter inventis, tracta ratio sit ad commentitios & factos Deos? quæ res genuit falsas opiniones, erroresque turbulentos & superstitiones pæne aniles, &c. — Accipimus enim Deorum cupiditates, ægritudines, iracundias, &c.

Hæc & dicuntur & creduntur stultissime, & plena sunt futilitatis, summæque levitatis. *ib. cap. 28.*

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alia, poterunt intelligi qui qualesque sint, quoque eos nomine consuetudo nuncupaverit, quos Deos & venerari & colere debemus.

Now here is certainly foundation enough left for justifying the worship of a multitude of ancient Deities, and even for forming new ones upon occasion.

As for the *Academics*, though they could not entirely come into the *Stoical* way of defending all this Superstition by reason and argument, yet they justified it by authority and ancient establishment. For so *Cotta*, in return to that advice which *Balbus* had given him, ^h to be, as became his office of Pontif, a Champion for the ancient opinions about the Gods and their Worship, Ceremonies and Religion; tells him, that he will always defend them to the last, as he had ever done, though he went upon other principles, and that nothing which any man could say should ever move him from this resolution. *Ego vero eas defendam semper, semperque defendi: nec me ex ea opinione, quam à majoribus*

^h Non enim mediocriter moveor auctoritate tuâ, *Balbe*, Orationeque ea, quæ me in perorando cohortabatur ut meminisssem me & *Cottam* esse & Pontificem; quod eo, credo, valebat, ut opiniones quas à majoribus accepimus de Diis immortalibus, sacra, cæremonias, religionesque defenderem.——

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bus accepi de Cultu Deorum Immortalium ullius unquam oratio, aut docti aut indocti, movebit. He was resolved to hear no reason against the doctrine of his Ancestors. Nay the very *Epicureans* themselves, whose great pretence was to cure men of Superstition, by running into another extream, and destroying all belief of Providence, yet not only in publick fell, most of them, in with the vulgar Superstition, for fear of censure, but were many of them really, in their very hearts, as superstitious as other people, however they pretended sometimes to over-act the contrary. For *Tully*, in the person of *Cotta*, tells us, ⁱ he knew some of them so stupidly superstitious as to worship every little image that came in their way; and that *Epicurus* himself, (though some, by his incorrect manner of writing, concluded that he designed to conceal his true opinion, and that as he denied a Providence, so he really had no belief or fear of any Gods at all, yet) was really at the bottom more afraid of those invisible powers, than those who never formally denied their Influence: thus in fact confuting his own pretended

ⁱ Novi ego *Epicureos* omnia figilla numerantes. [Al. venerantes. al. inhiantes.] *Cic. de Nat. D. lib. 1. cap. 30.*

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tended opinion, by a most slavish and abject fear of, what he denied to have any matter of terror in them, ^k*Death* and the *Deity*. Now as we may from hence justly observe, that the belief or fear of a Deity is so deeply engraven upon the Mind of man, and as it were woven into human nature, that no assumed principles of Philosophy can ever be able totally to efface it: so we may likewise conclude, that none of all these Sects of Philosophers were capable of leading men back to the original truth of Religion, after it had been once so miserably corrupted, as it was in the Heathen world: and consequently that a Divine Revelation was necessary, to reform mens notions, and to reduce them to the true practice of Religion. But

5. It is farther to be observed, that divers of the wisest Philosophers, did themselves confess, that they wanted a divine Revelation to set them right, even in matters which were of the utmost consequence. They were sensible that all the establish'd Religions, which they knew in the world, were exceedingly corrupted:

^k Ille vero Deos esse putat; nec quemquam vidi, qui magis ea, quæ timenda esse negaret, timeret; Mortem dico & Deos, *ib. cap. 31.*

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corrupted: and yet owned, that they saw no human way of reforming them; the little that was true, being mix'd with so much falshood, that they knew not how to distinguish them. And therefore ¹ *Plato*, supposing Religion to be the foundation of all good Government in his Commonwealth, plainly acknowledges the necessity of a Divine revelation, to establish such a worship as might be acceptable to God, and render him propitious; and he remits every wise legislator to the divine Oracles for direction. He speaks indeed of the *Delphic Oracle*, either as knowing no better, or perhaps as not daring openly to contradict a vulgar opinion: but the foundation of his Argument manifestly shews his opinion of the necessity of something more than human, to settle matters upon a right foot^m; and the reason

¹ Τὰ μὲν τοι Ἀπόλωνι τῷ ἐν Δελφοῖς τὰ τε μέγιστα καὶ κάλλιστα, καὶ πρῶτα τῶ νομοθετημάτων. — Ἰερῶν τε ἰδρύσεις καὶ θυσίαι καὶ ἄλλαι Θεῶν τε καὶ δαιμόνων καὶ ἡρώων θεραπῆαι, τελεσθησάντων τ' αὐθῆκαι, καὶ ὅσα τοῖς ἐκεί δὲ ὑπερηστῆνας ἴλεως αὐτὰς ἔχουσιν· τὰ γὰρ δὴ τοιαῦτα ἔτ' ἐπιστάμεθα ἡμεῖς, οἰκίζοντές τε πόλιν ἢ δὲν ἄλλῳ πεισόμεθα, εἰν νῦν ἔχωμεν, ἢ δὲ χρησόμεθα ἐξηγητῇ, ἀλλ' ἢ τῷ παλαιοῖ. ἔτ' γὰρ δὴ παρ' ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὰ τοιαῦτα πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐξηγητής. *Plato de Repub. lib. 4. pag. 427.*

^m Τῶν πάντων νομοθέτης, ὅστις νῦν κέκλην καὶ τῷ βραχυτάτῳ, ἔποτε μὴ τολμήσῃ καινολομῶν, ἐπὶ θεοτέθειαν, ἣτις μὴ σαφές ἔχει τι, τρέψαι πόλιν ἑαυτῇ καὶ μὴν εἰδῶν οἱ πάτερ νόμοι εἰρηκε

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reason which he gives, why no wise law-giver should innovate any thing in matters of Religious worship, without a very evident ground, is not only because the ancient law of our forefathers, is supposed to be originally founded upon some Divine admonition, but also because *Human nature* alone is not capable of knowing what is fit to be done in the case. And ⁿ *Tully* gives much the same, as one of these reasons, upon the like occasion. And as to matters of Morality, as well as of Religion, they owned, ° that as the state of the world then was, there was no human means of reforming it; and only a Divine institution could do the business, as *Plato* frequently intimates; ^p *no man having sufficient ability to teach men as they ought to be taught, unless God himself were his guide and director* ^q; and upon

είηκε περὶ θυσιαῶν ἀπκωλύσει, μηδὲν τὸ ἀρχαῖον εἶδος, ὥστερ
 εἶδ' ἂν διωκτὸν εἰδέναι τῇ θρησκείᾳ φύσει τ' τοῖσιν πείει. *Plato.*
Epinomis. p. 985. where see likewise a long passage foregoing the
 words here cited.

ⁿ Jam ritus familiæ patrumque servari, id est, quoniam antiquitas proxime accedit ad Deos, à diis quasi traditam religionem tueri. *Cic. de Legg. lib. 2.*

° Εὐ γὰρ χρὴ εἰδέναι, ὅτι παρ' ἂν σαθῇ τε καὶ γένῃ οἷον δὲ ἐν
 τοιαύτῃ κατὰσάσει πολιτειῶν, Θεὸς μοῖραν αὐτῷ σῶσαι λέγων ἔ
 κκαὶς ἐρεῖς. *De Repub. l. 6. pag. 494.*

^p Ἀλλ' εἶδ' ἂν διδάξειεν, εἰ μὴ Θεὸς ὑφηγοῖτο. *Epinom. p. 989.*

^q Ἀμειλῆσαι δὲ ἔθνη μίαν ἐστὶ Θεῶν, *Ib. pag. 992.*

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upon that account *an application to the Deity could not, without great impiety, be neglected.* The Truth is, the Philosophers found themselves so greatly perplexed with one anothers ^r contradictory reasonings, as in most other things, so, particularly in the great motives both to Religion and Morality, the rewards and punishments of another life; that those of them, who did really themselves believe them, yet had not courage enough to assert their own belief, in so constant or positive a manner, as was necessary to convince others that they were in earnest, for want of some more demonstrative assurance, which they might apply to all capacities. What ^r *Sim-*
mias,

^r Τὸ μὴ ἀληθὲς ὃ ξένη διαχυεῖσθαι ταῦτα ἕτως ἔχειν πολλῶν ἀμφισβητούντων, Θεῖ. *Plato de Legg. l. i. p. 641.* Nec tamen, quasi Pythius Apollo, certa ut sint & fixa quæ dixerō; sed ut homunculus unus è multis probabilia conjectura sequens. *Cic. Tusc. Q. l. i. cap. 9.*

^r Ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ, ὃ Σώκρατες, περὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἴσως ὥσπερ καὶ σοί· τὸ μὴ σαφὲς εἶδέναι ἐν τῷ νῦν βίῳ, ἢ ἀδιώαλον ἢ παρὰ χάλεπόν τι· τὸ μὲν τοι αὖτὰ λεγόμενα περὶ αὐτῶν, μὴ ἔχῃ παντὶ τρέφῳ ἐλέγχειν, καὶ παραφρίσασθαι πρὸν ἂν πανταχῇ σκοπῶν ἀπέπη τις, πάντῃ μαθακῆναι ἀνδρός· δεῖν γὰρ περὶ αὐτὰ ἐν γέ τι τέτῳ ἀφραφῆσθαι, ἢ μαθεῖν ὅπῃ ἔχῃ, ἢ οὐρεῖν· ἢ εἰ ταῦτα ἀδιώαλον, τὸ γὰρ βέλλισον τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λόγων λαβόντα, καὶ δυσεξελεγκτότατον, ἐπὶ τέτῳ ὀχόμενον, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ χειδίας κινδυνεύοντα ἀπλεῦσαι τὸ εἶον· εἰ μὴ τις διώαλο ἀσφαλέστερον καὶ ἀκινδυνότερον, ἐπὶ βεβαιότερον ὀχήματι, ἢ ΛΟΓΟΙ ΘΕΙΟΙ ΤΙΝΟΣ, ἀπαπορροῦσθαι. *Plat. Phædon. pag. 85.*

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mias, in *Plato's Phædon*, delivers as his own sense of this matter, may well be taken as the real opinion of the most serious of them. *This*, says he, O Socrates, *is my opinion, as it may probably be yours, in matters of this nature*, (speaking about the future state of the Soul) *that to know the certain Truth in this life, is either impossible, or at least exceeding difficult. But not to examine strictly what is said about them, or to give over before we have considered the matter so far on every side, as to find it insuperable, is the part of a mean and lazy mind. For in this case, we must resolve upon one of these courses, either to learn of others how the matter stands, or to find it out our selves; or if both these be impossible, we must take the best human reason we can find, and that which is least liable to exception; and upon this plank, or raft, must sail through life as well as we can, unless any one can meet with a safe and less hazardous passage, upon a firmer bottom, i. e. some Divine revelation.* This is a remarkable passage, and shews the sense which they had of their want of something more than human reasonings, to make their condition safe and secure. But, that which is yet more considerable to this purpose is; that some
of

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of them not only saw and acknowledged their great want of a Divine revelation, to set them right in their conduct both towards God and Man, but likewise express'd a strong hope or expectation, that God would, one time or other, make such a discovery, as should dispel that cloud of darkness in which they were involved. This appears from a very remarkable *Dialogue* in *Plato*, (concerning *Prayer*) between *Socrates* and his young Pupil *Alcibiades*: wherein the Philosopher shews his sense of the exceeding great corruption of all the Heathen worship, and on how unreasonable thoughts of the Deity most of it was founded; and how cautious therefore wise men ought to be, in their addressees to him, lest they should offend against the purity and perfection of his Nature, by petitioning for things not only improper, but dangerous and hurtful to themselves in the issue. And he concludes, that *men ought to wait patiently, till they are*

Ἦ ἀναγκαῖον ἔν ἐστὶ περιμένειν ἕως ἂν τις μάθῃ, ὡς δὲ πρὸς
Θεὸν, καὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους διακρίσθαι. ΑΛΚ. Πότε ἔν παύσαι ὁ
χρόνος; ἔτι, ὦ Σόκρατες; καὶ τίς ὁ παιδῶσαν; ἤδιστα ῥ' ἂν μοι
δοκῶ ἰδεῖν τῆτον ἢ ἄνθρωπον, τίς ἐστίν. ΣΩΚ. Ἔγός ἐστιν ὃ
μέλει πείσθαι· ἀλλὰ δοκεῖ μοι ὥστε τῷ Διομήδῃ φησὶ τῶν Ἀθηναίων
Ὁμηρος· ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀφελεῖν τὴν ἀχλὺν,

"Οφρῖ

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are taught more perfectly how to behave themselves, both towards God and Man. And when Alcibiades enquires, when that time would come, and who should be this great instructor; Socrates replies, "He it is who has the greatest concern imaginable for you, and who will remove the present cloud from your mind, and then apply something that may enable you to discern the true difference between Good and Evil, as *Minerva*, in *Homer*, is represented dispelling the mist from the eyes of *Diomedes*, that he might distinguish between a Divine and human person." That *Socrates* did not mean himself by this Divine instructor, as some are willing to surmise, is evident from his generally disclaiming any such sufficient knowledge, as being himself in much uncertainty, and always remitting men, in cases of difficulty, to the

B b

Oracle.

"Ὅφρ' εὖ γινώσκει ἥρην Θεὸν καὶ ἄνδρα;

"Οὕτω καὶ σὺ δὲν δὴ τὴν ψυχῆς περὶ τὸν ἀφελόντα τὴν ἀχλίω, ἢ νῦν παρῆσα τυχεύεις, τοτὶνικαῦτ' ἤδη περισφίρειν οἱ ἂν μέλλεις γνωστέας ἡμῶν κακὸν καὶ ἐσθλόν. νῦν μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν μοι δοκῆς διωκθῆναι. ΑΛΚ. Ἀφαιρείτω εἴτε βέλεται τὴν ἀχλίω εἴτε ἄλλο τι, αἷς ἰγὼ παρεκδόσμαι μηδὲν ἂν φεύγειν τ' ἴω' ἐκείνους περισφαιμένους, ὅσις ποτ' εἶναι ὁ ἀνθρώπος. εἴ γε μέλλοιμι βελτίων γενέσθαι. ΣΩΚ. Ἀλλὰ μὴ καί κεῖν θανύμασθ' ὅσῳ περὶ σὲ περιθυμίαν ἔχει. ΑΛΚ. Εἰς τότε τοίνυν καὶ τὴν θυσίαν ἀναεῖαλας χρεῖστος εἶναι μοι δοκεῖ. ΣΩΚ. Καὶ ὁρθῶς γε σοὶ δοκεῖ. ἀτφαλέσσοι γὰρ εἶναι ἢ ὥσπερ διώκῃν ἐστὲν τὸν ἐκδιδόν. ὅτε καὶ ἀντιπρὸς αὐτῷ. li. pag. 150, 151.

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Oracle. Neither did *Alcibiades* understand him so, as appears from hence, ^v that as he offers a garland to *Socrates*, in token of gratitude for his good advice, so he promises all other due offerings to the Gods, when he should see that happy day which *Socrates* had given him some ground to hope for, and which he hoped would not be far off, since it depended upon their favour and good will. *Socrates* indeed, in his *Apology*, as *Plato* has represented it, owns himself to have been an instrument raised up by providence, to awaken the *Athenians* out of that lethargy of wickedness and disorder, into which they were fallen; ^w but that possibly they would take his admonitions so ill, (as men in a slumber hate to be awaked) that they would, at the instigation of his Accuser, take away his life: and then they might sleep on securely ever after; unless God himself should send some other express Messenger to take care of them.

However,

^v Τοῖς Θεοῖς δὲ καὶ τεφάνης καὶ τὰλλα πάντα τὰ νομιζόμενα τότε δώσομεν, ὅταν ἐκείνῳ τῷ ἡμέραν ἐλθῇσαν ἴδω· ἥξει δ' ὁ Διὰ μακρῶν, ῥέτων θελοντων. Ib.

^w Ὑμεῖς δ' ἴσως τάχ' ἂν ἀχθόμενοι, ὥπερ οἱ νυσάζοντες ἐγείρομενοι, κρύσαντες ἂν με πειθόμενοι Ἀνύτῳ, ῥαδίως ἂν ἀποκλείνητε, εἴτα τ' λοιπὸν χρόνον καθύδοντες διγίλοῖτε ἂν, εἰ μὴ τινα ἄλλον ὑμῶν ὁ Θεὸς ἐπιπέμψῃ, κηδέμενον ὑμῶν. *Platonis Apolog. Socr.* pag. 31.

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However, let the lowest meaning possible be put upon these, and the like expressions: thus much may certainly be concluded from them, that the best men thought, the sending of a Divine revelation, to reform both the Religion and Morality of the world, was neither unnecessary; nor, considering the goodness of God, unreasonable to be expected. To these Considerations we may also add; Lastly:

6. That such men as now think that no Revelation was ever necessary; but that the want of it might always have been sufficiently supplied, by the use of human Reason alone, do not state the matter fairly; because they unwarily confound part of that light which we insensibly receive by the Revelation of the Gospel, with that light of Nature which men had before it: that is, they do not distinguish between those notions which the mere Heathen world were in possession of before, and those which they attained to after the preaching of the Gospel. And yet whoever carefully considers it, will find that Christianity made a very considerable alteration, both in the notions and practices, even of those who continued obstinate opposers of its establishment. Just as the great light, which accompanied the Reformation of the Christian Religion it self;

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in these later ages, helpt to correct some of the doctrines and practices, even of that corrupt part of Christendom, which refused to embrace the principles of the Reformation itself; and whose doctrines and practices, for want of that light, which was even against their inclination forced upon them, would otherwise, instead of being corrected, have been continually growing worse and worse; so some part of the light of Christianity broke in upon the Neighbouring heathen world, whether they would or no. And though their manner of writing was not so polite, as that of some of the more ancient Philosophers, yet their thoughts and reasonings were much improved. And I make no question, but *Plotinus*, and others of that time, put a more sublime meaning upon some of the Doctrines of *Plato*, and other Ancients, than they themselves ever thought of. And so likewise they invented new Hypotheses, to account for ancient practices. Thus, for instance, though they did not wholly discard Polytheism and Idolatry, yet they refined upon it very much, to make it as plausible as they could, and came much nearer towards the acknowledgment of the Unity of the Supreme Being, and the Attributes of his Divine nature, than their ancient
prede-

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predecessors had done. And when they saw the Christians, with such assurance asserting, and with such constancy dying, for the belief of a Future state of Rewards and Punishments, they themselves spoke of it with more certainty, and laid much greater stress upon it, than had been done formerly; making it a necessary foundation for the constant perseverance in virtue; which others, for want of a sufficient assurance of this matter, were forced to recommend from more abstracted motives, and such as were both less intelligible, to a common capacity, and less effectual. And therefore *Hierocles* tells us, * *that those who imagine the Soul of man to be mortal, are more in jest than in earnest, when they pretend to talk of not abandoning virtue upon any terms. For if there be nothing in us which survives after death, and which naturally would be adorned with Truth and virtue, which is what we affirm of the Rational Soul, then we could have no pure affection, or desire of Good.* And it is very remarkable, that even

B b 3

Celsus

* Ὅθεν καὶ οἱ θνητῶν διοῦργοι τὴν ψυχὴν, ὡς εἰ μὴ περιέσται τὴν ἀρετὴν, κοινψύουσιν μάλλον ἢ ἀληθεύουσιν· εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἦν τι ὑπομένον ἡμῶν μετὰ θάνατον, καὶ τὰ τοῦ φύσιν ἔχον ἀληθεῖα καὶ ἀρετῇ κοσμεῖσθαι, ὅσον δὴ φανερὸν εἶναι τὴν λογικὴν ψυχὴν, ὅσα ἂν ἔφευγας ἡμῖν καθαροὶ γίνοιτο τὸ κελῶν. *Hierocl. in Carm. Aurea.*

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Celsus himself, an *Epicurean*, in his books against the *Christian Religion*, is forced to own his approbation of the Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul, and of Future rewards and punishments ^y; which it is certain none of the more ancient *Epicureans* would ever have done. And as for our modern Deists, who have any tolerable notion, either of natural Religion or true Morality, they are more beholding for it to that light of Revelation, in the midst of which they live, and which has greatly cleared up, and firmly established, the principles of Reason, though they will not own it, than to any of those human discoveries, which Philosophers, utterly destitute of such Revelation, or living before it, could certainly lead them to. So that when men argue against the necessity or usefulness of Revelation, from the present improvement of Reason, they argue against fact and experience. And if they were not both very ungrateful, in disowning and despising that light, whereof they

^y Τὸτο μὲν γε ὀρθῶς νομίζουσι, ὡς οἱ μὲν εὐ βιάσαντες δυνάμειν ἴσασιν, οἱ δὲ ἀδικοὶ πάμπαν αἰωνίοις κακοῖς σιμῶνται, καὶ ταῦτα δὲ ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος μὴδ' ἔτι, μὴτ' ἄλλω ἀνθρώπων μηδεὶς ποτε ἀποστήσει. *vide Origen. Contra Cels. lib. 8. p. 409. And to the same purpose, Μήτε τῶτοις εἴη μητ' ἐμοί, μὴτ' ἄλλω τινὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀποστήσει τὸ ἀεὶ ἔκκολαθῆσθαι τὰς ἀδικίας, καὶ γεγεῶν ἀξιοθήσεσθαι τὰς δικαίας δόξας. lib. 1. pag. 120.*

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they enjoy so great benefit without considering it; and extremely vain, in thinking so much better of their own natural abilities, than they do of those of all the greatest men in the times preceding the light of the Gospel; they could not but think it more likely, that such wise and serious men as *Socrates*, *Heraclitus*, *Plato*, *Cicero*, and others, should understand the state of the world in their own time, and know how much could be done, in that state, towards finding true Religion, and bringing men to the practice of it, upon the foot of mere human reason, much better than we can do at this distance; when we cannot be so sensible of the want of Revelation experimentally, because we are prevented by the antecedent enjoyment of it. Men who are bred and brought up in *Christian* Countries, where the great principles, both of Natural and Revealed Religion, are commonly profess'd, and discoursed of, without distinction; and our whole duty, with all the proper rational Motives to it, are made parts of ordinary instruction; even though they have never strictly consider'd the additional evidence which Revelation gives, yet will be able to see, how agreeable to Natural reason and conscience many things in this light now appear to be,

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which they could never have so clearly discovered, if they had not been so effectually, though to themselves insensibly, assisted. Just as a man bred up in a Maritime province, where he daily sees ships, and converses with seafaring persons, though he never made Navigation his profession, will certainly have a readier apprehension of what belongs to it, and frame to himself more consistent notions of it, than another man of equal understanding, who has always lived upon the Continent, far remote from any such conversation. It is not always easie, to discern how much of that stock of knowledge, which any man has, was acquired purely by his own industrious application of his thoughts, and how much by the external teaching of others; but yet it is always evident, that without the latter, he could not have made so great a progress as not to need any more teaching for the future. So though there be now no occasion for any new Revelation, to make the principles of natural Religion better understood; since we can, by the help of that light, which we have already had from heaven, make such use of our natural Reason, as to see our original obligation in point of Religion and Morality; yet, without that light, men were fallen into such a

maze.

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maze of uncertainty, that it's evident the wisest of them could not, of themselves, find the way out of it. And why should any man now think, that if he had been in the same state, he should have had better success?

And therefore upon the whole from such considerations, as I have mentioned, and which I might have drawn out to a greater length, we may justly conclude, that as in the nature of things there can be no Impossibility of God's making a particular Revelation of his will to men, nor considering our natural notions of the Goodness of God, any reason to think it Incredible, that he should at some time or other make such Revelation: So considering the general condition of mankind without it, such Revelation is by no means to be look'd upon as useless and Unnecessary.

I shall now proceed more briefly to consider the third thing which I propos'd in the beginning of my first discourse on this Text, *viz.*

III. That it is every rational man's duty to use all the proper means he can to find out what is true Revelation, and what is only pretended.

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pretended. And this I think will not need any long deduction of arguments to prove it; because it seems to be a very natural consequence from the two former propositions, of which I have hitherto been speaking more at large. For if it be agreed, that every Rational man, who believes a God and a Providence governing the world, is under a natural obligation to enquire, whether God has made any particular Revelation of his will to men, which they are any way concerned to take notice of; which was the first of those propositions: And if whoever seriously makes this enquiry will find it reasonable to conclude, that some Revelation might be justly expected from the Goodness of God, considering the general state of mankind without it, which was the second; Then it is certainly very Reasonable, that every man, who is thus persuaded, should apply himself very seriously to find out, what Revelation is true, and what not; that he may neither be imposed upon, by admitting equally all pretences to Revelation, nor cut himself off from all benefit that may arise from that which is true, by rejecting all equally. It is evident to all men, who will give themselves any time to consider, that there is, and has long been

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been in the world, a great variety of pretences to Revelation, and different Schemes of Religion have been formed upon them; and that these cannot possibly all be true, because they not only differ from, but manifestly contradict, one another in many cases. And it is on the other hand very plain also, that if there never had been any true Revelation at all, there could not have ever been any ground for men's universally making such pretences to it: unless we could suppose, that God had laid our nature at first under an invincible necessity of being perpetually deceived; which is inconsistent with our original and most natural notions of his Goodness. and therefore to come at the truth it is necessary, either strictly to examine all the particular pleas of the several pretenders to it, and compare them with one another, which would be a work too great for any one man to go through with, in his whole life; or else we must fix upon some general acknowledged Principle, which, being once establish'd, will always be a ready *Criterion* to distinguish the true from the false, and which we may at any time apply as occasion offers.

Now if it can be made appear, that there is any one continued and standing Revelation,
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the parts of which have successively given light to one another, though delivered at different times and upon different occasions; and which has in it all the internal marks and characters of Truth and Goodness, and all the external evidence of Fact, to support its pretensions of being from God, which any reasonable man can desire: if it appeals to the common sense and reason of mankind, and never fears an open and publick examination of the grounds upon which it stands, nor could ever be reasonably accused of imposture, by those who saw the facts which were intended to give testimony to it, and yet were so far from being parties to the design, that they were greatly prejudiced against it: I say, If there be any such Revelation as this, it must be the true one, as coming from God. And all other pretended Revelations, set up in opposition to it, or assuming some seeming imitation of it, in order to gain themselves credit for a while, are to be disregarded; as being either false or impertinent. And wherever this Revelation is, which has all these external and internal evidences of Truth, which no imposture can have, there we may truly say, is, *the mountain of the Lord, and the House of the God of Jacob.* And to this
every

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every man ought to apply himself, because there he may expect *to be taught the ways of God.*

And that there really is in the world such a Revelation, to which we may apply ourselves for the knowledge of all such truth as is necessary, in order to conduct our lives according to the will of God: so that we may be assured of attaining the truest happiness of which our rational nature is capable: and that this Revelation is proved to be from God, by as good evidence as either the nature of the thing will admit, or any reasonable and unprejudiced man can desire, is what I shall endeavour to shew in my following Discourses: wherein I shall consider not only the nature of Miracles, which give attestation to any Revelation, but the nature of the Revelation itself, which Miracles are wrought to establish.

All that I shall now add, is only this reasonable request; that men would honestly apply themselves to the examination, both of the nature of the doctrine revealed, and the evidence for it, with such an unprejudiced mind, as becomes the sincere love of Truth:
and

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and that they would shew as much care and diligence in it, as a matter of so great importance justly requires. And *may the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, give unto us all, the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in the knowledge of him.*

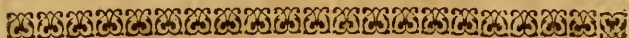


SERMON



S E R M O N XIII.

Preached *May* the 5th 1718.



St. John iii. 2.

----- *Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these Miracles, that thou doest, except God be with him.*



Hese words are the confession of *Nicodemus* to our blessed Saviour, testifying his conviction, from the Miracles which he wrought, that that he was a person sent from God to be a Teacher of men. Who this *Nicodemus* was, it is not necessary to enquire farther than the
Scripture

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Scripture has told us; which informs us, that he was a *Pharisee*, that is, one of the most exact Sect among the *Jews*, in the knowledge of Scripture and of the Traditions of the Elders: and that he was a Ruler of the *Jews*, that is, one of the *Sanhedrin* or Great Council at *Jerusalem*, and so was not only a Teacher, but a man of some dignity and authority, *A Master of Israel*, as our Saviour's expression is. And that which makes his coming to our Saviour; with this free acknowledgment, the more observable, is, that the persons of his station were of all others the most averse to the entertainment of Christ's doctrine, because of that Interest and Authority which they had acquired among the people, and which they were very unwilling to part withal; which yet was in great danger of being lost, or greatly impaired, by the growing credit of our Saviour's Preaching. Even *Nicodemus* himself, though convinced in his own mind, that our Saviour was a Messenger sent from God, yet durst not venture to be openly seen making this confession to him. Though he was in some degree a *Disciple*, yet it was *secretly, for fear of the Jews*. However he went farther than the rest of his order would do in this

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this confession ; though probably more besides himself were inwardly convinced of the truth of what he confess'd : for he speaks in the plural number, *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God* : meaning thereby, either that others of his rank, as well as himself, were inwardly of the same sentiments; though they would not own it; or however, that the Miracles which Jesus did were so plain and undeniable; that every unprejudiced man must needs, as he thought; be of the same opinion which he here professes himself to have. And if the reason for making this conclusion were then so strong and pressing; when our Saviour was but newly entered upon his office, and had not yet done so many wonderful works as he afterwards did, and especially while the great Miracle, of his Resurrection from the Dead, was yet wanting ; how much more strong and conclusive must it needs be, when these are added to it, and confirmed by the following Miracles; which his Apostles wrought in his name and by his Authority ? But the argument here used in the Text, whereby *Nicodemus* persuaded himself, that our Saviour was a Teacher come from God, is a general one, founded upon this, that *No man could do such Mi-*

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acles unless God were with him ; and therefore I shall not confine my self only to the Miracles of our Saviour, much less to those only which he wrought before this discourse with *Nicodemus* ; but shall speak more generally of Miracles, as they are supposed to be an argument for the truth of that Revelation which they are wrought to confirm, and as all true Revelation has ever been confirmed by them. And to make this matter as clear as I can, I shall take the following method.

I. I shall endeavour to shew, what we are to understand by a Miracle.

II. That the possibility of Miracles is not contrary to Reason: and consequently that wherever they have been wrought, their credibility is capable of a rational proof.

III. How we may distinguish such Miracles as are from God, and wrought in confirmation of Divine Truth, from such as are wrought, or pretended to be wrought, in confirmation of Error and False Doctrine.

IV. Wherein that assurance consists, which Miracles, thus distinguish'd, give us, that the person employed in working them has a Divine commission, or is a *Teacher sent from God*.

V. What

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V. What evidence we now have from the Miracles anciently wrought, that the Christian Doctrine, contained in Scripture, is truly a Divine Revelation, and to be always embraced as such.

I. I shall endeavour to shew, what we are to understand by a Miracle. Now if we were in general to take only the bare Etymology of the word, it means no more than something which is very strange and wonderful, or surprising to our senses, something which men admire at as very unusual, and seldom or never known to have happened before. And in this sense all the rare and extraordinary occurrences in nature may be, as they sometimes are, called Miracles. But this does not come up to the full import of the word as it is used, in Scripture and other Authors; to signify something extraordinary done for some particular end and design. There are in the New Testament divers words, in the original, which in different places are translated *Miracles*,^a which may perhaps have some small difference of signification, if we were to make

Cc 2

a minute

^a Θωμάτια, τέρατα, δυνάμεις, but the most usual word is σημεῖα.

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a minute distinction between them. But being often used promiscuously for one another, there is no occasion to be particular about them: but to speak to the thing itself intended by the general word *Miracle*: which may be thus described. A strange and wonderful effect, obvious to the senses of the beholders, yet produced by supernatural means, or by the interposition of some power, superior to all human or ordinary powers that we know of, invisibly assisting the person at whose instance the effect is produced, and by consequence giving attestation to him. So that to make any thing not only a true, but a significant Miracle, there are these three conditions required.

1. That the effect produced be something, which is plain and obvious to the Senses of the beholders.

2. That it be Supernatural, or exceed all natural human power known to us.

3. That it be done for some evident end and design.

1. That the effect produced be something, which is plain and obvious to the Senses of the beholders. For otherwise it can be no Miracle to us, unless it be evident to our Senses as well as strange and wonderful. Thus all
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the Miracles recorded in Scripture, are things that did really and evidently appear to all beholders. The facts were such as appealed to the Testimony of mens Senses, for the certainty and reality of them, being plain beyond all dispute to all that were present; or else there could never have been any controversy, either about the power producing them, or the end for which they were wrought. So that where only the imaginations of weak people are wrought up to such a degree of amusement, by some artificial tricks, that their Senses are for a time deluded, so as not to mind what passes, but to fancy they see any thing that is told them, there is no Miracle. And so likewise whatever hidden effect is really produced in any thing, by what means soever it be done, yet it cannot be a Miracle, to any purpose, till it become the object of Sense. The next condition required in a Miracle, is,

2. That the effect be Supernatural, or exceed all natural human power known to us, either in respect of the matter, or the manner of it. *i. e.* When the effect produced is not only unusual, but either such as no human or visible power can produce in any manner, as raising the dead to life again; or such as in

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the manner and circumstances, exceeds the limits of all human power, as the curing diseases by a word speaking. For though it be not a Miracle to cure a disease, by the application of proper medicines, and the assistance of time, yet to do it in an instant with a word speaking, either without any application at all, or by applying something contrary to all human probability, as clay to the eyes of a blind man, is miraculous: and so it is to speak divers languages without ever having learned them. 'Tis not the thing it self effected, but the Manner and Circumstances of effecting it, which is miraculous, and requires a supernatural power. But by *Supernatural*, I do not mean such a power, as exceeds the natural power of every Created Being whatever, so that it should necessarily be the immediate and infinite power of God; but only, that in respect of human power it be supernatural, or exceed all the known powers of the visible Agent. For I suppose that Angels, both good and bad, are able to do things far exceeding all human power, by virtue of that natural power which God has originally given them; and so, being to us invisible, may do, or assist men to do, things which to us are truly miraculous. And thus several things recorded in

Scripture

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Scripture as miraculous, are said to be done by Angels: as the destroying 185000 men in the *Assyrian* camp in one night; the Earthquake, and the rolling away the stone from our Saviour's Sepulchre; the opening the prison doors for St. *Peter*, and striking off his chains; and many other things of like nature.

Nay farther, some things which are said to be done by God himself, are in other places also said to be done by Angels, as being done at his command by their ministry; as the rescuing of *Lot*, and destroying of *Sodom*. So that except we knew the full extent of all the natural Powers of all such invisible Beings as are superior to us, we cannot, in every instance, (nor is it necessary that we should) exactly distinguish such effects as are wrought by the immediate power of God, from such as are wrought by Angels at his Command, or by his Permission; unless it be where the things themselves are particularly ascribed to his immediate power alone, or are of such a nature, as manifestly to require a power equal to that of creating Something out of Nothing.

And as this is the case of Good Angels, so, I think, there is no reason to doubt, but that Evil Angels also, or wicked Spirits, may, by God's permission, work some Miracles, without ex-

ceeding their own natural power ; that is, may do, or assist in doing, things, which human power alone cannot effect. This seems to be plainly supposed in divers places of Holy Scripture. Thus ^b *Moses* allows, that there might arise a Prophet or dreamer of dreams among the people, who might give a sign or a wonder, and that sign or wonder might come to pass, which was intended for seducing them to other Gods ; and he says, that God, by suffering this, would prove whether they *did love the Lord their God with all their heart*. And our Blessed Saviour ^c plainly foretels, that there should arise false Christs, and false Prophets, which should shew great signs and wonders, in so much, that if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect : And we find that the Magicians of *Egypt*, by their enchantments, did some of the very same Miracles which ^d *Moses* and *Aaron* did, though they were not able to go on to do the rest. There are some, indeed, that suppose these Miracles of the Magicians were not really wrought, or that there was no change made in the object, as the beholders supposed, but that mens senses were only deluded ; for which
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^b *Deut.* 13. 1, 2.

^c *Matth.* 24. 24.

^d *Exod.* 8.

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there does not seem to be any ground from the Text. Nor does such a Supposal solve any part of the difficulty, or make the matter less miraculous. For it does not require a less power to alter all the organs of sensation in a whole multitude of By-standers, than it does to alter the things that are the objects of sense, in a matter which is properly to be determined by our senses. And if no farther Miracles had been wrought by *Moses* and *Aaron*; but the same which the Magicians did, or persuaded the Beholders, upon the credit of their senses, that they did; then the Beholders would have had no means of distinguishing, by the Miracles, which of them acted by the Superior power; but must have had recourse to some other kind of evidence, to prove which of them was from God. For they could no more know whether *Moses* did not delude their senses, than they could whether the Magicians did. And besides, there is this very great inconvenience, in supposing all such Miracles to have been delusions of sense, that it will be a great weakening of all arguments from matter of fact, which relies upon the evidence of sense. For if the same appearances, to all intents and purposes, can be caused when a thing is not done,

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done, as when it is really done, how can I ever know whether it is done or no?

And thus they, who think there can be no true Miracles to us, but what are wrought by the immediate Power of God, will find it as difficult to prove when Miracles are really wrought, as it can be, supposing them wrought, to prove what are from God, and what are from wicked spirits. Indeed there is no question, but that a great deal of Cheat and Imposture has pass'd upon ignorant and superstitious people for Miracle. And the Scripture tells us of *Lying wonders*, which the *Man of Sin* should work, *whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs and lying wonders*. But this hinders not, but that some of the works of Satan may be really such signs and wonders as are truly above any human power to effect. And those may be truly called *Lying wonders*, which are extraordinary and wonderful things really done in order to establish a lye, or false doctrine. And the Apostle seems to intimate as much, in telling us for what reason God does justly permit those to be deceived, who are

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are not real and sincere Lovers of Truth: who perish, *because they received not the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved: and for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they may believe a lye.*

Now if it be consistent with the Goodness of God, to suffer such as do not sincerely love the Truth, to be deceived by lying wonders of one kind, why not also of another? No doubt the Devil, who was a Lyar from the beginning, is as willing to exert his natural power, as far as God permits, for the deceiving of mankind, as wicked men are. And the consequence of mens being deceived will be the same in one case, as in the other.

But,

3. Another Condition requisite to make an effect miraculous in the strict sense, is, that it be done for some evident End and design. Every unusual event, how surprizing soever it may be in itself, and how unknown soever the cause of it may be, is not any Miracle to us, unless it have some plain design, for which it is done, annexed to it. One very common name for Miracles is σημεῖα, or *signs*; but nothing can be truly a *sign*, which is not plainly intended to give evidence to something besides it self, such as the attesting to the Truth of
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some particular Doctrine, or giving credit and authority to some particular person, at whose instance such unusual effect is produced. A miracle then, from its end or use, is to be considered, as *An effect produced in a manner contrary to the usual method of providence, by some invisible intelligent Being, superior to man, in order to give Testimony to the Truth of something which would otherwise appear, at least, doubtful or uncertain.* The next thing therefore which I would observe is,

II. That the possibility of Miracles, such as we have now been describing them, is not a thing contrary to Reason; and consequently, that where-ever they have been wrought, their credibility is capable of a Rational proof.

Those who call themselves *Deists*, and yet discard all Revelation as a fiction or human invention, generally fall into this persuasion, that there can be no such thing as a Miracle. Because they see the frame and order of the visible world disposed in an uniform manner, and its motions preserved in a constant and regular course; so that there is a constant succession of effects orderly following their causes, as it were by a stated law or rule; from thence they imagine, the course of Nature to be something

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thing so fix'd, as never, upon any occasion, to admit of any change: as if the material world were something entirely independent upon the will of God, and had Original powers of its own, which no Intelligent Being could either limit or controul. From an indistinct and ambiguous use of the word *Nature*, (as I have formerly observed^f) men are apt to confound Causes and Effects; and from hence they ascribe, an Active principle to the things themselves, which are merely passive, and are acted upon. This leads them to think, that what they call the course of Nature cannot be altered, but by some power superior to that power by which it is preserved. This, in the end, will terminate in a supposition, that the world preserves it self, or that there is no necessity of the Divine direction or concurrence, and by consequence, no necessity that it should at first be made by an Intelligent Being. Whereas, if men would carefully distinguish between that which really acts, and that which is only acted upon, they might soon be convinced, that as the material world, or any part of it, has no will or power of its own, nor can ever of it self begin motion or action; so whatever is moved or acted, must originally

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ly and ultimately be moved or acted by some Intelligent and free Being; and that therefore, all things which are done in the world, and all the effects which are produced, either ordinary or extraordinary; are either done immediately by God himself, or by some inferior Intelligent Beings; Matter having no powers of its own, nor being capable of any law or rule of acting, but what an Intelligent and Free Being imposes upon it; no part of it ever acting, without first being acted upon. So that, properly speaking, the Course of Nature in general is nothing else but that continual uniform manner in which the Supreme Intelligent Being produces certain effects, according to his own will. And this manner of acting, in every particular instant, depending upon his will, may if he sees fit, be as easily altered at any instant as continued. So that what we call a Miracle, requires no more power in the real Agent, than what we call the course of Nature. And the same may be said, as to Inferior or Created Intelligent Beings, as far as the compass of their natural power, which God has bestowed upon them, reaches: and how far it does reach we cannot certainly know. Men may, if they please, call the working a Miracle a violation of, or contradiction to, the laws

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laws of Nature ; but then they should consider what they mean by laws of Nature, and not make a Free and Intelligent Being necessarily subject to those laws of motion, by which it chuses ordinarily to produce such and such common effects upon matter, which we therefore call Natural, because they are usual and constant ; not that they are antecedently necessary, in respect of the first Agent, whether it be the Supreme, or any other Free and Intelligent Being, which has a real and true power of Acting, and not barely a capacity of being acted upon. And from this way of reasoning it follows, that Miracles are not impossible, if we believe the power of a free and intelligent Being, always actually concerned in the constant preservation of what we call the Course of Nature : and consequently, the Credibility of Miracles is capable of a Rational proof. Where-ever they are wrought they are matters of fact, and may be proved, by proper evidence, as other facts are : and though I cannot give a mechanical account of the manner how they are done, because they are done by the unusual Interposition of an invisible Agent, superior, both in power and wisdom, to my self ; I must not therefore deny the fact which my own senses testify to be done.

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done. The Truth is, we can no more solve the ordinary *Phænomena* of nature, without having recourse at last to an Intelligent Being; than we can these extraordinary ones which we call Miracles. In one case indeed we know more of the circumstances which go before and follow, because we see the things oftner; and are more familiarly acquainted with them; than we are in the other case; but still the first mover is the same in both: and as he testifies the constant interposition of his providence acting, either mediately or immediately, in the one case; so does he likewise testify an extraordinary interposition, upon rare and extraordinary occasions, in the other. No man will say, that it requires a greater power to drown the Earth, or to divide or dry up the Sea, than it did at first to make them, and still to preserve them as they are at present: and therefore, if I believe the one, though I can give no account of the manner how it was done, why should I be so much concerned to find out the manner in which the other must be done, or else to think it impossible? A Miracle is supposed to be a thing which rarely happens, and only upon special occasions, and therefore is not to be expected in every age. But is it therefore incredible, that ever there
should

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should have been any such things done, because they are not now done? Or have I any reason to disbelieve Miracles well attested, and not repugnant either to the Goodness or Justice of God, but, on the contrary, highly conducing to the more manifest declaration of both, only because they were done several ages ago; any more than I have to disbelieve the more ordinary occurrences of Providence, which passed before my own time, because the same occurrences in a continued train, may perhaps never happen while I live? I would by no means encourage an unreasonable credulity in any case, and much less in a case of so much moment: but if, to avoid this, men are resolved to believe, that all the relations of facts esteemed miraculous, are false, how well attested soever they be; they ought never to charge others with being too credulous: because they themselves then believe one general conclusion, as unreasonable as the most absurd relation of any miracle, can possibly be. The true way to avoid credulity, in either case, is to consider proper evidence, and to be determined by that. But it is equally unreasonable, to believe every thing false, as to believe every thing true, which depends upon the Testimony of others.

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Supposing therefore, that Miracles, which are extraordinary effects, produced by some Intelligent power, superior to man, in order to give evidence to something beside themselves, do not in their nature imply any thing impossible to be done, and by consequence are capable of being proved when they are done; we are next to consider,

III. How we may distinguish such Miracles as are from God, and wrought in confirmation of some divine Truth, from such as are wrought, or pretended to be wrought, in confirmation of error and false doctrine.

This is necessary to be considered, because we have already allowed, that a power, less than Omnipotent, may work real Miracles. And if we allow that there are Beings both good and bad, who are naturally, in power, far superior to mankind; unless we suppose them perpetually restrained by God Almighty from ever producing any effect, which can become sensible to us, though it be never so much within the compass of their natural power and will to effect it; then we must endeavour to find out some way to distinguish such unusual effects, as are occasionally produced by the
assistance

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assistance of God or Good Angels, from such as are wrought by the Devil and his Agents; since, without some means of distinction, we cannot make any good use of either.

Now the difference, between these two sorts of Miracles, does not always depend upon one single point; but upon the considering and comparing of several circumstances taken together: which should make us the more careful that we be not rashly surprized into a mistake, upon one sudden or single appearance, before we have viewed the rest.

Marks of distinction proper to the forming a true judgment about the matter will arise, partly from the things which are done; that is, the Miracles themselves; and partly from the End for which they are done, or from the nature of that thing which is intended to be proved by them. And when both these are such as are worthy of God, according to the best natural notions which we can have of his Attributes and Perfections, then we may justly conclude; that they are from God, or from such powers as act by his commission and direction.

1. As to the Miracles themselves, Those which are divine, will have some apparent circumstances of advantage, to distinguish them

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from such as are either delusive or diabolical, if they are sincerely and carefully attended to. Upon comparison, a considerate Enquirer may discover of what kind they are, either by their Greatness, or Number, or Long continuance, or visible tendency to the Good and benefit of men.

I. Their Greatness often discovers whence they proceed: It was this which distinguished the Miracles wrought by *Moses* and *Aaron*, from those which were wrought by the Magicians of *Egypt*. It is said ^s, that They turned their rods into Serpents as *Aaron* did; but *Aaron's* rod had this advantage, that it devoured their rods. It is also said, that upon turning the waters into blood, * *the Magicians did so with their enchantments*. And again, ^h that as *Moses* brought up frogs, so the Magicians likewise brought up frogs upon the land of *Egypt*. But the destroying those frogs at the appointed time, is attributed to *Moses* only. And then, as to the turning the dust of the earth into lice, this the Magicians could not do, but owned it was the finger of God. Whether this exceeded absolutely the Natural power of wicked Spirits, any more than the produce-

^s *Exod.* 7. 12.

* *Y.* 22.

^h *Exod.* 8. 7.

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producing of frogs; or whether that power was here restrained which they were before permitted to exercise, as it is hard for us to know, so it is not necessary to be determined: for however it was, the Magicians were forced to confess, that the power by which *Moses* wrought his Miracles, was superior to that by which they wrought theirs. In like manner we find, that *Simon Magus*, who had so far deluded the people of *Samaria* with his Sorceries, (that is, either with real miracles, done by the assistance of wicked Spirits, or at least such strange effects as they could not distinguish from real, which to them was all one) that they concluded him to be *the great power of God*, upon the appearance of the Apostles was presently put out of countenance, by the exercise of a power which he could not pretend to, though he would gladly have purchased it. So *Elymas*, another Sorcerer, was struck blind by *St. Paul*. And it is acknowledged by the Heathens themselves, that the Miracles wrought by their Dæmons or false Gods ceased, and their Oracles were put to silence, about the time that Christianity begun to be preached. *Julian*ⁱ himself owns the fact, though

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ⁱ Vid. Cyril. contra Julian. p. 198. Ed. Spanhem.

he would fain give another solution of it. Again;

2. The Number of Miracles, and especially when they are of different kinds, is another mark of distinction; when not one or two of an obscure or suspicious nature, but many, and unquestionable facts, such as give great numbers of people, of all capacities and all parties, opportunity of seeing, and making strict enquiry into them.

Thus the Miracles of *Moses*, were not only one or two things which the Magicians could not come up to, but many, of several distinct kinds, and very remarkable, such as the whole nation were witnesses to. And those of our Saviour were neither few nor private, but of many kinds, and wrought before vast multitudes, both of friends and enemies. The facts were undeniable, however they disputed about the nature of that invisible power by which they were produced.

3. When Miracles are of long continuance, either as to the works themselves, being often repeated upon proper occasions; or as to the durable effects of them; when they make such a remarkable change in the course of things, as must be observed by every one, and long remember'd in the world, then they shew the power

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power of God. Of this nature were the Miracles which God shewed by *Moses*, in *Egypt*, in the *Red Sea*, and in the Wilderness; and such were the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles. They were not presently over, so as to make impression upon men only for a little time, and then, as it were, to vanish; but they lasted many years; and there are visible marks of the wonderful effects of them remaining in the world to this day. Both *Jews* and Christians are a standing monument of them, and of the truth of those wonderful prophecies which accompanied them.

These marks which I have hitherto mentioned, are chiefly marks of Power. And where-ever Miracles are opposed to one another, as in the case of *Moses* and the *Magicians* for instance, that which prevails, and puts to silence the other, must needs proceed from the Superior power. This is both a reasonable and obvious way of judging in case of competition. But Power is not all: For,

4. And lastly, The Goodness of Miracles, or their visible tendency to the general good and benefit of mankind, is a great sign of their being from God, or good Spirits employed under him. The nature of the fact will have some resemblance of its Author. Those won-

ders which the Devil and his Agents work, will be either wicked and mischievous, or at least freakish and fantastical, such as serve to no good purpose, but only to amuse or affright the beholders, or to entangle them in some farther evil. Such were generally the Miracles pretended to be wrought by the Dæmons or false Gods of the Heathen, either full of cheat and imposture, so as not daring to abide the light of a fair trial; or when they had any thing real in them, it was mix'd with something either absurd and ridiculous, or else cruel and ill-natured, or impure and vile, such as none but a lying, wicked and unclean Spirit could assist in. But divine Miracles are of another kind: as they proceed originally from the Author of all good, so they are likewise, in their nature and tendency, good and beneficial to men; instances of particular kindness and compassion, either to their Souls or bodies; and are never wrought but for great and weighty reasons. If we consider those that are mentioned in holy Scripture, we shall find that they always tended to some great and excellent purpose, such as the comfort and support of Good men, and deliverance from great and pressing danger. Sometimes indeed there appears a great mixture of Severity in some of them,

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them, but then such Severity was exercised upon very wicked people, who were past being reclaimed to their duty, and was designed for a standing monument of God's indignation against grievous offenders: as the plagues of *Egypt* were indeed severe miracles upon a cruel and tyrannical nation; but even these were at the same time great instances of mercy, to an oppressed and suffering people, who were thereby delivered from a long and cruel bondage; as well as evidences of that divine Revelation which was now to be made to them. And all our Saviour's miracles were instances of the greatest charity to men: effects of power directed by goodness, and marked with the plainest characters of Divine Wisdom and Compassion.

Hitherto I have mentioned those marks which help to distinguish the miracles themselves. But then,

2. The End for which miracles are wrought, *i. e.* the doctrine intended to be proved or confirmed by them, is likewise to be considered, in order to judge truly from whence they proceed. For if it be such as is plainly unworthy of God, or contradictory to his perfections and moral attributes; or if it evidently overthrow what he has already established

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blished by many plain and unquestionable miracles, then another miracle cannot be sufficient to prove it. For miracles can only be a testimony of the truth of something possible to be true. Neither is the tryal of miracles by this touchstone at all unreasonable (for it is not proving in a circle, as I shall have occasion to shew hereafter, when I come to consider the nature of that assurance, or evidence which miracles give.) *Moses* gives this plain direction, where the miracles are supposed to be real, which are wrought by a false prophet, or at least not otherwise to be distinguished. ^k *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other Gods, to serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet. For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul. And he gives this reason, why such a prophet should be treated as a wicked impostor, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God,*

^k Deut. 13. 1.

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God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. No miracles are sufficient to establish the worship of a false God, which would be contrary both to our natural notions of the true God, and in the *Israelites* contrary to those many and great miracles which he had wrought in delivering them out of the land of Egypt. God might therefore suffer false prophets to work miracles, to try the sincerity of his people, having before-hand given them this caution, and having likewise laid down a plain and sure Rule, to distinguish what prophets were from him, if they would but carefully and honestly attend to it.

There is indeed another good Rule laid down, for distinguishing between the true or real, and false or pretended prophets, which is by the Event, or judging of their pretences by the issue, *1 If thou shalt say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the Name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken.* But this case does not belong to our present consideration: for though real and true prophecy

¹ Deut. 18. 22.

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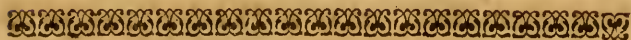
phesy be indeed a miracle, yet a pretending to Prophecy is not so : For it is no more than what any confident impostor may assume : whose pretences are easily confuted, when the event proves contrary. But where there is no event to judge by, we must have some other evidence of the truth and sincerity of any pretended prophet, before we are obliged to give credit to him : and then the foregoing Rule is to take place. And the same will now hold under the Christian Dispensation. For the Doctrine of Christ being a Revelation every way worthy of God, and being established and confirmed by such miracles as, both for number and kind, for evidence and greatness, are beyond all reasonable contradiction, is now itself a touchstone for trying all future doctrines. And whatever Spirit shall contradict this, is not of God. As St. John says, *By this we know the spirit of Truth and the spirit of Error.* And therefore St. Paul plainly declares, ^m that if either *himself or an Angel from heaven should preach any contrary doctrine, he ought not to be believed ;* because no doctrine could receive so great confirmation, in any kind, as the Gospel had already received.

SERMON



S E R M O N XIV.

Preached *September* the 1st, 1718.



St. John iii. 2.

----- *Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these Miracles, that thou doest, except God be with him.*



IN my former discourse upon these words I proposed to consider these several particulars.

I. To shew what we are to understand by a Miracle.

II. That

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II. That the possibility of Miracles is not contrary to Reason: and consequently that whereever they have been wrought, their credibility is capable of a rational proof.

III. How we may distinguish such Miracles as are from God, and wrought in confirmation of Divine Truth, from such as are wrought, or pretended to be wrought, in confirmation of Error and False Doctrine.

IV. Wherein that assurance consists, which Miracles, thus distinguish'd, give us, that the Person employed in working them has a Divine commission, or is a *Teacher sent from God*.

V. What evidence we now have, from the Miracles anciently wrought, that the Christian Doctrine, contained in Scripture, is truly a Divine Revelation, and to be always embraced as such.

The three first of these particulars I have already spoken to, in a former discourse, and shall now, without repeating what was then said, proceed to the fourth, which is, To shew, wherein that assurance consists, which Miracles, so distinguished, as before described, can give us, that the person employed in working them has a Divine Commission, or
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is a *Teacher sent from God*: for upon this assurance, whatever it is, the force of *Nicodemus's* reasoning here in the Text is grounded. And upon this must be grounded all the testimony that miracles can give to any doctrine. Now allowing that such miracles, as are wrought by any person, proceed from a Divine Power, the Question is, How far they secure us of the veracity of that person who appears to be the instrument in working them? Or what connection there is between the truth of the miracle, and the truth of his doctrine? And the answer to this in short is, That our assurance in this case depends upon our natural notions of the Truth and Goodness of God, which we believe to be as essential and necessary Attributes of an infinitely perfect Being, as Power and Wisdom. He cannot deceive any more than he can be deceived. And therefore, as we cannot conceive it to be a thing becoming, or worthy of the Divine Majesty, to work a miracle for no end or purpose at all, so much less can we conceive it to be consistent with the perfection of his Nature, to work one on purpose to deceive an innocent and sincere seeker of truth. It cannot be thought consistent with infinite Goodness and Veracity to give such countenance

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nance to an impostor. This would be like sealing him a Commission to deceive in his Name, who is particularly called *A God of Truth*. Now that all men naturally have this notion of God, that he neither can be deceived himself, nor intend to deceive others in what he declares to them, is evident, not only from the confession of the wisest Heathen Moralists, ^a who had nothing but natural light to guide them, who constantly argue upon this supposition, as an allowed principle among such as had a true sense of natural Religion: but likewise because those who go about to disprove or unsettle any part of Revealed, or pretended Revealed, Religion, assume the same principle; when they attempt to destroy its credit, by assigning something in it which they imagine not reconcileable to the truth of things. So that the principle is allowed, both by those who assert and those who deny Revelation. And which is yet more, unless Truth and Veracity be a perfection so necessary to the Divine Nature, that

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^a Κομίδῃ ἄρχῃ ὁ Θεὸς ἀπλῆν καὶ ἀληθῆς ἐν τε ἔργῳ καὶ ἐν λόγῳ καὶ ὅτε αὐτὸς μετίστα, ὅτε ἄλλος ἐξαπαλῶ, ὅτε καὶ φαντασίας, ὅτε καὶ λόγους, ὅτε καὶ σημείων πομπὰς, εἴ ἢ ὑπάρ, εἴ δ' ὅταρ. *Plato de Repub. lib. 2. pag. 382.*

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we may entirely rely upon it in all cases, we can have no assurance even of the truth and certainty of our own Faculties; but may, for ought we know, be under a perpetual delusion, in those things where we think we have the clearest and most distinct perception; and and consequently can never be able to judge aright of truth or falsehood in any case. For if the Author of our Being be not absolutely a God of Truth, the very frame of our Understanding may be such as to be always deceived.

But since our fundamental notion of God is, That he is a Being of all possible perfection: And since Truth and Fidelity are allowed to be Moral perfections necessary to an Intelligent Being, we cannot suppose him deficient in these, without derogating from the allowed perfection of his Nature; much less can we ascribe the contrary to him: which yet we must necessarily do, when we imagine, that he really employs his power to give credit to a falsehood, or authorizes any man to work a miracle in his Name, to confirm any declaration contrary to truth; or that he suffers any man to use such a power, as cannot be distinguish'd from Divine, in confirmation of an error, or human fiction, without giving

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ing some sufficient means to an honest mind to disprove him if he attempts it. And therefore the man in the Gospel, who had been born blind, and was miraculously cured by our blessed Saviour,^b went upon a natural ground when he argued thus with the *Jews*, *Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine Eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God and doth his will, him he heareth,—and if this man were not of God he could do nothing.* The *Jews* had just before declared, *that they knew*, or were fully persuaded, *that God spake unto Moses*; And therefore they profess'd themselves his Disciples. But now how did they know this, but by the evidence of those miracles which *Moses* wrought in the Name of God? At this this therefore the man justly wonders, that they should be so unreasonably partial, and should not upon the same evidence believe, that *Jesus* was from God, as well as *Moses*. This is certainly a good argument, in particular against those who profess'd so great a reverence for *Moses*, and whose whole re-
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^b *Joh. 9. 30.*

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vealed Religion was owned to be established upon the truth of his Miracles, and who were taught by that Religion to expect, that the *Messias*, when he came, should work Miracles also; not only because that was the usual way, by which God had given attestation to his former Prophets among them; but because the *Messias* in particular was to be a Prophet like unto *Moses*; and their own former Prophets had foretold, that he should work many Miracles. This made those that were most unprejudiced among them, when they saw the Miracles which *Jesus* did, enquire whether this were not indeed the Christ, and say,^c *When Christ cometh, shall he do more Miracles than these which this man hath done?* But though this argument has a more immediate force in it against the *Jews*, who lived under the profession of a belief of miracles, yet it is not without a natural foundation in Reason, even in respect of all that have any just sense of the Perfection of Divine Providence.

I have before^d shewn, that Miracles cannot be look'd upon as things impossible, unless it be by those who exclude an intelligent and free

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^c *Joh. 7. 31.*

^d *See the foregoing Sermon.*

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Providence from the constant government of what we call the course of Nature: which makes the *Epicurean* Poet,^c when he ridicules Miracles, as fit only to be believed by *Jews*, assert it, as his settled opinion, that there is no such thing as *Divine Providence* any way concerned in the effects of Nature, whatever happens, ordinary or extraordinary. But as those, who own the world to be governed by the powerful direction of a wise Providence, cannot reasonably deny the possibility of Miracles, when there is a proper occasion for them; so neither can they, who believe the Moral perfections of the Divine Nature, reasonably suppose Divine Miracles ever to be intended to give countenance to any deceit or falshood; since this would as effectually destroy our natural notions of the Truth and Goodness of God, as denying their possibility would destroy those of his Power and Wisdom.

Upon these considerations therefore I think we may justly conclude, that whatever Revelation is attended with such miracles, as I have

^c ————Credat Judæus apella
 Non ego. Namque Deos didici securum agere ævum;
 Nec, si quid Miri faciat Natura, Deos id
 Tristes ex alto cæli demittere tectis. *Horat. Sat. 5. lib. 1.*

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have before described Divine miracles to be, must necessarily be a divine Revelation: and that we cannot otherwise be deceived by it, but either by our own negligence, in not sufficiently attending to the terms in which it is delivered, and thereby mistaking its meaning; or by wilfully perverting the sense and design of it through partiality, prejudice, or some prevailing passion, contrary to a sincere and unprejudiced love of truth. And I cannot readily think of any objection, to which this way of reasoning, from the Truth of God to the truth of Revelation thus attested, is liable, but only this, That a person, who has once wrought true miracles in the name of God, and thereby gained a just credit to his doctrine, may possibly afterwards revolt from the truth, and by virtue of that credit and authority, which his former miracles gave him, may teach another doctrine, for which he has no such commission. And this is a case which may be supposed possible, from what *St. Paul* says, *‘Though we (i. e. himself or any other Apostle) or an Angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.* Now to clear

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^f Gal. I. 8.

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the objection which may be made from hence, concerning the difficulty of discerning between true and pretended Revelations, there are these two things to be considered.

i. Though it be supposed, that a person once truly commissioned by God to declare his will, may possibly forsake or transgress the terms of that commission, and declare something afterwards, which is not the will of God; yet it cannot be conceived agreeable to the Divine goodness and truth, that God should suffer his credentials to continue with him after such a defection: that is, it is no way probable, that he should be assisted with the same power of working miracles, after his revolting from the truth, which was at first given him to confirm it. And to this purpose what our Saviour said to his disciples, upon occasion of one that cast out devils in his name, whom they forbade to do it, because he did not follow them, is very considerable: *Forbid him not, (says he) for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.* While this power is continued to him, he cannot readily be my enemy. God can easily withdraw his credentials

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tials from one that begins to make an ill use of them; and he will leave no honest mind under a necessity of being deluded by him. But it is also to be considered,

2. That those persons to whom any doctrine is propounded, as a Revelation from God, are supposed both to have a capacity, and to lie under a natural obligation, to make an honest and diligent use of their own reason and judgment, in distinguishing between greater and less evidence, as well as in discerning when one doctrine contradicts or differs from another. They are likewise supposed to have the Knowledge of the common principles of natural Religion to go upon, and to act according to those principles, that they may not be deceived in admitting any pretended Revelation which contradicts them. And therefore suppose they were once convinced, by a plain and unquestionable miracle, that a message delivered to them by such a person, was really a message from God, this ought not to make them absolutely depend upon every other message, which the same person might possibly deliver afterwards, so far as to receive them all without examining, whether they agreed with that original message, for which his credentials were first given him.

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For this would be an unreasonable credulity, which, if not guarded against, might lead to the destruction of all rational faith in revelation; inasmuch as it would expose a man to the belief of contradictions, as often as a man, that had once a true Revelation, should think fit, upon the credit of that, to pretend to another which was not true. And to this purpose there is a remarkable instance, in the old Testament, of a Prophet punished for too easy a credulity in the pretended Revelation of another prophet, without considering, how far a former certain Revelation made to himself, which it contradicted, was to be attended to in opposition to it. The case was this. ^h A man of God was sent from *Judah*, with a prophecy against the altar at *Bethel*, the truth of which he confirms by an immediate Sign or Miracle, both upon the altar itself, and upon the King, who burnt incense upon it, when he offered violence to him. And the same Revelation, of which he had this conviction, directed him from God, not to eat or drink in that place, nor to return the same way that he came, after he had delivered his message. This direction he observed for a
time,

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time, and in virtue of it refused the King's invitation. But another old prophet, falsely pretending the message of an Angel, seduces him back, and perswades him to eat and drink : And while they sit at the table together has a real message from God revealed to him, declaring, that the prophet, who had thus suffered himself to be deceived into an act of disobedience, should be punished for this offence, by not having his carcase come into the sepulchre of his fathers. Which prediction was soon verified upon him, by his being slain by a Lyon, before he could return home. Now the observation which I would make from this account, pertinent to our present purpose, is this; That the prophet, who had a divine direction given to himself by a Revelation, of the truth whereof he was perfectly assured, both by the internal conviction of his own mind, and by the outward testimony of a miracle added to it, ought not to have suffered himself to be countermanded, even by one that had the reputation of a true prophet, without as great, or greater evidence, that God had discharged him from the first command. The subject of the command indeed does not appear to be in its own nature indispensable, and consequently it might have
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been superseded by the same Authority which gave it; but then, he ought to have had as plain and full assurance of the Revocation, as he had at first of the Command, or else, to disobey was a manifest transgression of a known duty. Whether he had an inclination to stay and be entertained at *Bethel*, which might make him desirous to have the Command relaxed, and therefore too ready to believe it so; or whether he had only too implicit a confidence in the old Prophet, because of his age and authority, and therefore did not give himself time enough to weigh the evidence for and against his pretended message, is not very material. Certain it is, that his Credulity was culpable, in being determined by a less evidence against a greater, in a matter of divine Revelation.

Now to apply this to the case put by *St. Paul*, of an Apostle, or an Angel from heaven, preaching another Gospel, or declaring other terms of Salvation, than what were at first declared by the Gospel of Christ, which had been received upon the highest evidence. We may justly reason, that they ought not to be regarded by any one, who knew and believed the divine Authority of the first Publishers; because two contradictory Revelations

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ons cannot both be from God ; and the first being admitted upon the greatest evidence of divine Authority that the matter is capable of, whoever pretends afterwards, by that Authority, to offer another, contradicting what he has before delivered, may indeed weaken the credit of the former, as far as his testimony goes, but can never establish the credit of the latter : because I can never have greater assurance of the truth of any Revelation whatever, than I naturally have of this first principle of all reasoning, that *Contradictions cannot be true*, since if it were supposed possible that they could, then there could be no difference between Truth and Falshood, but both might be the same.

Upon the whole therefore, the evidence which we have from Miracles of the truth of any Revelation, supposes the Truth of our own faculties, and the first principles of Reason. It supposes likewise a belief of the Being of God, and the perfection of Goodness and Truth in the Divine nature. And whatever is contradictory to these cannot be capable of any proof, because the argument to prove by, and the thing intended to be proved, destroy one another. And therefore, if the evidence of divine Miracles is ever alledged

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ed in proof of any doctrine, contradictory to the divine Nature and Attributes, we may be sure that there is some mistake in the application, since one Truth can never really contradict another. And this makes it a very proper undertaking sometimes, to shew the reasonableness of the whole Christian Revelation; and that it is a doctrine every way worthy of God, even at the same time that we prove its divine Authority by unquestionable Miracles. For it may be observed, upon this occasion, that as, in the proof of any relation whatever, the nature of the evidence, and the nature of the thing to be proved, are both to be taken into consideration; so in the case of a Revelation said to be from God, and the evidence which is brought to prove it such, that is, Miracles, or Divine Testimony, both the nature of the Revelation it self, and the nature of the Miracles, are carefully to be attended to, before we can truly judge, whether the proof, and the thing to be proved, answer one another.

And this is not proving in a circle, as some weakly imagine, but is the necessary way which is used in all cases of Testimony whatever. A thing must be granted to be capable of being proved; that is, it must be supposed possible,

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possible, before any evidence whatever can be allowed to prove it.

To put the case in a plain and familiar instance. A man, with whose character we are altogether unacquainted, gives us, in writing, a long and particular relation of many things in a foreign country, of which we have never had the like account before: and lest we should doubt his veracity, he brings ample Testimonials of divers persons of great credit, well known to us, to vouch, that they have long known him to be a person of great integrity, and every way well qualified to give a just account of all the matters relating to the country of which he treats. Now if, upon reading and considering his relations, we find nothing in them contradictory to reason, or inconsistent with it self, then we are induced, upon the Testimony of his vouchers, to believe his account. But if we doubt, or have an ill opinion of the integrity of those persons, whom he brought to testify for his veracity, or have reason to suspect their Testimonials forged, then the relation which he gives of foreign matters, how credible soever it may be in it self, (and though we think it true for other reasons,) as it can receive no credit from such insufficient Testimony, so neither
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can it give any credit to it; but it will stand just in the same state of doubt and suspicion that it did before. So that here is no proving of the Testimonials, and the Relation each by the other in a Circle. But yet if the relation, for which this evidence is alledged, be either manifestly contradictory to itself, or to some plain and evident principle of truth, then it is beyond the possibility of being proved by any evidence whatever, and shews, that the testimony brought to favour it was either false or mistaken. This instance is easily applied to the matter before us, and shews, that the truth of the doctrine or revelation is not brought to prove the truth of the miracles, because the same doctrine would be true in itself, though no miracles were wrought to confirm it to us: But Divine miracles were wrought to assure us, that this true doctrine was from God. And yet on the other hand, a doctrine evidently false cannot be proved true by any miracles, but destroys the Credit and Divinity of such miracles as are pretended to confirm it: Since nothing can prove a thing to be what it is not.

The whole is no more than this: If the miracles are Divine, the doctrine to which they

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they give testimony is Divine also : and therefore prove the Antecedent, and the Consequence will follow. But on the contrary, if the doctrine is supposed false, the miracles, that offer to prove it, cannot be true. And therefore to prevent this consequence, shew, that there is nothing to be objected to the truth of the doctrine. And this is no more arguing in a circle, than what is contained in every *hypothetical Syllogism*.

And thus from the nature of human Testimony and the evidence it gives to such Relations as are supported by it, we may see the connection between Divine Testimony, or Miracles, and Divine Revelation : only there is this advantageous difference on the side of Divine Testimony, that it is a more certain proof of what it is intended for, than any Human Testimony can be, because it is infallible, and proves the truth of what it is rightly applied to, beyond all possibility of doubting. And if we are led into any mistakes by it, the ground of them must be either in our misunderstanding of the doctrine, or misapplying the evidence to something else than that for which it was first intended : For if a doctrine be contradictory to the Divine nature, as no miracles can prove it true, so we may depend

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depend upon it, that no Divine miracles were ever wrought with an intent to prove it. Our natural notions of the truth of God will not allow us to have such an unworthy thought of him. And herein consists that assurance which divine miracles give us, that the person imploy'd in working them has a divine commission, or is entrusted with a declaration of the will of God. I now proceed in the next place to shew,

V. What evidence we now have from the miracles anciently wrought, that the Christian Doctrine, contained in Scripture, is truly a Divine Revelation, and to be always embraced as such. The former consideration went no farther, than to shew, in general, the sufficient force of divine miracles, to convince a reasonable man of the truth of that doctrine or Revelation, for which they are given in evidence; and therefore immediately, and in the first instance, can respect only those who lived at the time when such Revelation was made, and such evidence given in confirmation of it, and both applied to their own senses, so that they had the utmost opportunity possible of enquiring into, and comparing every circumstance. But as for us, who live at this distance

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distance of time, and never had the happiness to hear those that had the original commission to declare this doctrine, nor to see their credentials, the case is different. And therefore, supposing all the foregoing argument granted, yet some will say, what is that to us? or, how are we affected by it? Now to this I answer, in short, that we are just so far affected by it, as we can have any certainty of these two things:

1. That such miracles were really wrought;
And

2. That the doctrine contained in Scripture is the same doctrine which was then revealed, and for which they were wrought.

And for both these we have as good evidence as the nature of the things is capable of, which is as much as any reasonable man can desire. Besides an inward and supernatural Revelation from God to a man's own mind, of which none can be conscious, but the person himself to whom it is immediately made, there are but two possible ways, whereby we can be assured of any matter of fact, as the thing now in question is. The first is the evidence of our own Senses, and the second is a sufficient testimony of credible witnesses. The first of these kinds of assurance no man

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can have for the thousandth part of those things which yet he most firmly believes and acts upon, without any scruple, in all the affairs of life; and it would be both unreasonable and endless to desire it. Those who lived in the time of our Saviour and his Apostles, could not all of them have this kind of evidence, though great numbers had it. Much the greater part of the men of that generation must necessarily depend upon the testimony of others, which is the second way of assurance. But now this being of divers kinds, and admitting of different degrees of credibility, according to the capacity, integrity, means of information, and the like different advantages, which those have who give testimony: And their manner of delivering it being also of two kinds, by word of mouth, or in writing, we ought to consider, whether we have not, in all these respects, the very best kind of testimony that we can desire. Living evidence, of those who were eye and ear witnesses, can belong to none, but those who lived in the same age when the things are supposed to be done, or very near it. And therefore after ages cannot have this way. But then they may have what is equivalent to it; that is, they may have all the particulars conveyed

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veyed down to them in writing, which may be more authentick than any single oral evidence, if we could have it, can be. A Record or History, written at the time when the things are done, by persons of unquestionable integrity, and capable, in all respects, of giving true evidence, is the best human ground of assurance that any fact at such a distance is capable of. Now the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, and an account of the Revelation which they made, have stood upon such a record from the very time. For the same Original History which gives an account of the Miracles, gives us also an account of the Doctrine, for the establishing of which those Miracles are said to be wrought, together with many particular circumstances attending the preaching of it. So that whatever evidence we have, that the relation of miracles recorded in Scripture is true, we have the same evidence, that the doctrine of the Scriptures is the same which was then delivered. And accordingly these are now inseparable parts of the same Record, and must stand or fall together. And unless we are resolved to disbelieve every thing for which we have not the immediate evidence of our own senses, we

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have as good rational ground of assurance, of the truth of this record, as we can desire; that is, as much as any unprejudiced man would require in any other case.

But if it be objected, that this being a matter of the greatest moment of all others, we ought not to be content with the same kind of evidence, which may reasonably satisfy us in other cases of less concern: To this I answer.

1. That the very making of this objection is a sign, that men are not so sincere lovers of truth, and so impartial in the embracing of it as they ought to be. For if when two things equally evident are proposed, a man should say, I will believe the one, because I have no concern in it; but I will not believe the other, because, if I do, it must make a great alteration in my conduct, which I am resolved against. Would not this be look'd upon as an unreasonable prejudice? The great moment of the thing is indeed a very good reason, why we should be more than ordinarily •inquisitive about it, that we may get as perfect a knowledge of it as we can, and be very diligent to examine into the truth of it, and consider well the evidence upon which it is

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is grounded; but it is no argument against believing it upon sufficient evidence, or for peremptorily requiring more than is necessary, though we may be glad when, upon enquiry, we find it more abundant than we expected.

A truth of small consequence may sometimes, by the very nature of it, have a greater number of evidences to it, than another which is of more moment; and yet if the latter have sufficient to prove it, we ought to be satisfied.

But,

2. The Providence of God has taken care to give sufficient satisfaction even to this prejudice also, and to remove the very ground of the scruple: and that by these two ways.

1. By unquestionable Records of our Religion, and the first evidence by which it was proved. And,

2. By divers successive subsequent Evidences given to it, which do more particularly affect the following ages.

1. The Records of our Religion, both as to the Miracles and the Doctrine, have better grounds of credibility, and more evident marks of truth than any other ancient History whatever, if we consider either the Books themselves, in which the things are designed-

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ly delivered; or the collateral Evidence to the facts, occasionally delivered by those who were no parties to them.

I. As to the Books themselves, which contain the sum of what we believe of the Doctrine and Miracles of Christ. They were written by several persons, in different places, yet all of them well acquainted with every circumstance of what they write; for they either heard and saw every thing themselves which they relate, or were constant companions of those that did, and had their attestation to the truth of their testimony. And they could have no possible worldly interest, which could induce them to assert what they did, if they had not been perfectly persuaded of the truth of it: but on the contrary, they knowingly ventured their lives for asserting it, and laid them down in defence of it. And that moreover they had the assistance of the Spirit of God, directing them in all necessary truth, they proved by the testimony of those Miracles, which God enabled them to work, both at and after the time of giving their testimony. But this is something farther than what I now insist upon. These writings were soon dispersed into great numbers

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bers of hands, and translated very early into many languages, kept in many places, far distant from one another, with a religious care, constantly read in publick, that all might be acquainted with them, and so not easily capable of being falsified. And though the constant use of those writings made them be much oftner transcribed than any other books, by which means there must of necessity, without a miracle, be many literal or verbal mistakes, or variations in the manner of writing, yet this great number of copies, which may be compared together, and so rectify'd by one another, has been a great security to all the essential doctrine contained in them. And farther, that these books were written at the time pretended, and by the persons to whom they are ascribed, we have a more universal and constant testimony, in every severall age since they were writ, than can be produced for any other writings so ancient; and this allowed without contradiction by the first enemies of Christianity, who undertook to write against it, who had better means of information than those that came after them, and would have been willing enough to have objected against their being genuine, if there

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had been any colour for it. And now are not such writings as these a more undoubted account of the Doctrine and Miracles of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, than any that can be produced for the life and actions of any other the most eminent persons that lived so long since? I think no man offers to question, whether there were such a person as *Alexander the Great*, who subdued the *Persian Empire*, and made other very great conquests in the world; and yet there is not now extant any particular History of any considerable part of his great actions, which can pretend to have been written by any that knew him, or till several ages after his time. *Ptolemy* indeed, the first King of *Egypt* of that name, and *Aristobulus*, two of his great Officers and companions, both writ his History; but their writings are long since lost. And if they were not, yet ⁱ *Arrian*, who perused them, tells us, that in many things they did not agree together, and that therefore, where they differed, he was forced to use his own discretion, and to chuse sometimes from one, and sometimes from the other, what he thought

ⁱ See *Arrian*, in *Proæmio*.

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thought most probable. And as for other writers upon the same subject, though they were very numerous, yet there was a wonderful disagreement among them: more and more inconsistent accounts having never been given of any man. And yet from such Memoirs as these, at the third or fourth hand, and so on, the History of that great Prince is delivered down to us. And we make no scruple of believing the substance of it, notwithstanding the considerable differences among the first writers in many particular circumstances. And the like may be said for almost any ancient human History. Now does not this give the Gospel History a very great advantage, in point of credibility, above any other, if we only consider the Authors by whom it was delivered to us? But,

2. We have also very considerable collateral Evidence to the facts recorded in those writings, occasionally given by those who were no parties to them. There are many remarkable passages, both in *Jewish* and *Heathen* Authors, *Greek* and *Roman*, which accidentally confirm the truth of those accounts which we have in the Gospel History, in point of Time and of Persons, and of divers

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diverse extraordinary particular facts. But these having been frequently taken notice of, both by ancient and modern Apologists for Christianity, I shall not now repeat them. I shall only by the way observe one thing, which seems to be very considerable in this case; That as to the Miracles of our blessed Saviour, the bitterest and most learned primitive enemies to Christianity, such as *Celsus* and *Porphyry*, have given sufficient testimony to them in point of fact, even by their very way of writing against them. For though they seem sometimes willing to treat them as *Fictions*, yet because they could not deny the account of them to have been written by eye and ear witnesses, they would not venture to abide by this plea, but chose rather to ascribe them to Magick, and in opposition to them to magnify stories of strange feats done by *Pythagoras*, *Abaris*, *Aristeas*, *Proconnesius*, *Apollonius*, and other impostors, many of which were forged long after their times to serve this turn, as it may be justly suspected, and the rest had very little colour of truth from any competent History; and if they had been true, could serve to no good purpose, being very trifling
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and ridiculous. Now if they could, with any probability, have denied the Miracles of our Saviour and his Apostles, they would never have taken this method of answering them. But of this I shall have occasion to take farther notice, when I come to speak of those successive subsequent Evidences to the truth of Christianity, which more particularly affect the ages after its first promulgation: which I intend, with God's assistance to consider the next opportunity.



SERMON



SERMON XV.

Preached *October* the 6th 1718.

Heb. ii. 3, 4.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will.



Have, in my two foregoing Discourses, consider'd the nature, and possibility of Miracles in general: How we are to distinguish what

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what Miracles are truly divine, and what are not ; and likewise upon what ground we may be assured, that the person working such Miracles, in the name of God, has a divine commission, or is enabled to reveal the will of God: and in the last place, I considered, what evidence we may now have, from the Miracles anciently wrought, that the Christian doctrine, contained in Scripture, is Truly a divine Revelation, and to be always embraced as such. And whereas this depends upon our certainty of these two things ;

1. That such Miracles were really wrought :
And,

2. That the Doctrine, contained in Scripture, is the same which was then revealed ;

I observed, that both these are contained in the same original records of the Christian Religion, and are inseparable from each other. And for the Truth of what these records contain, we have not only as good evidence in an human way as can be shewn for any other Historical relation of the like antiquity : But there are two Considerations which carry the matter yet farther ; and which may be sufficient, both to answer the great moment of the case, and even to satisfy the scruples, or prejudices, of such as are not obstinately resolved against it. One

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One is, That the Records of our Religion, both as to the Miracles and Doctrine, in respect of the Books and their Authors, have some particular grounds of credibility, or evident marks of Truth, above any other History of the like antiquity; of which I spoke briefly in my last Discourse.

The other is, That there are divers successive subsequent evidences to the Truth of Christianity, which more particularly affect the ages after its first promulgation, and which are a kind of standing Divine attestation to the Truth of it, and do, in a great measure, supply to us the want of that immediate sensible evidence of Miracles, which was peculiar to those who heard the first preaching of it. And I have chosen to speak to this Consideration, from these words of the Apostle, *God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will;* because in these words he sets forth that general attestation, which God was pleased to give to the Doctrine of Christ, as it was delivered by those whom he appointed to be his witnesses, expressed by several words, which may be understood to signify all the several kinds of extraordinary or divine evidence, upon which
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the truth of the Gospel was first established; not only such signs or wonders as were immediately wrought to gain attention to it, and to shew that its publishers had a Commission from Heaven; but such miraculous powers; or Gifts of the Spirit of God, as were of a more permanent nature; and such marks of Divinity as appeared in the very Doctrine it self, when the several parts of it came to be examined: which I shall therefore now take occasion more particularly to consider, under these two Heads.

I. Such extraordinary and wonderful Effects, as either attended, or were consequent upon, the first preaching of the Gospel.

II. The successive accomplishment of Prophecies delivered by Christ and his Apostles.

Which two things are standing instances, both of Divine Power and Wisdom manifested in the Christian doctrine.

I. Such extraordinary and wonderful Effects, as either attended, or were consequent upon, the first preaching of the Gospel; which were not of a transient nature, but of so long a continuance, as might give all its opposers
time

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time and opportunity thoroughly to consider, and examine into the Ground and reason of them : Of this kind we may reckon the strange and surprizing Manner, in which the Gospel was at first propagated into all parts, so much above all human probability : And the marvellous Effects which it had upon those who attended to it; where-ever it was propagated.

i. The surprizing Manner of its propagation, into all parts, so far above all human probability, considering the instruments employed in it, is a plain instance of a Divine power attending it. That persons of such a mean condition, as the Apostles were, unlearned and unexperienced in worldly policy, should set about so great a work, as that of persuading all the world into the belief of a matter of fact, such as the Resurrection of our Saviour was, for declaring of which at first they run the greatest hazards imaginable, is a plain evidence, that they themselves were fully convinced of the Truth of it, and of the importance of declaring it, as also of the mighty consequences to be drawn from it.

That they should hope for success in this enterprize, and therefore should go about it with the greatest resolution and courage, not-

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withstanding both their own weakness, and the mighty opposition they were sure to meet withal, could be owing to nothing, but a full and entire perswasion of Divine assistance, and an inward conscioufness, that they were *endued with power from on high*.

But that they should, so wonderfully, and above all human expectation, succeed in this design, and should persuade men, in such numbers, of all ranks, not only to believe, but also to engage themselves to maintain the belief of a thing, so much against all their present ease and interest, was what nothing less than the mighty Power of God could effect.

If *this device had been of men it must* of necessity have *come to nought*, as ^a Gamaliel wisely argued; since it wanted all those advantages which can give an Imposture any probability of succeeding. For whoever designs to put a cheat upon the world, and draw disciples after him to maintain it, with any hopes of success, must either have some Power and Authority to awe men, or great cunning and Policy to contrive matters so as to deceive them; or some specious pretense of worldly Interest, to draw them in; or else his doctrine must

^a Acts v. 38.

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must be suited to the corrupt inclinations of men, in order to allure them. Without some, or all of these, humanly speaking, no innovation of long settled custom is likely to prevail. But now the Apostles had none of all these advantages to recommend themselves or their Doctrine. They had neither force nor craft to engage men ; nor could they propose to their followers any earthly advantage, but the quite contrary : neither did their Doctrine gratify them with the allowance of any unreasonable sensual satisfaction, but commanded them to mortify every unruly desire of that kind ; and threatned them with eternal misery, if they indulged themselves in any unlawful lust or pleasure. And yet under all these circumstances, unprovided as they were, they designed to root out the settled Religion of the world, and to destroy the worship of false Gods, which had for a long time prevailed, and been confirmed both by law and custom ; and instead of such inveterate superstition to plant the Doctrine of a Crucified Saviour, and to persuade men to believe in him, without the assistance of any human Art or Eloquence, only by a plain relation of his Life, and Death, and Resurrection, a thing seemingly incredible to the prejudicate opinions of those who

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valued themselves for wisdom. Now how could they hope to compass so mighty a design, if they had not known assuredly, that *God would work with them, and confirm their word?* How could they, who but a little before out of fear forsook and denied their Master, on a sudden become so full of courage, after his departure from them, as to declare those who crucified him to be murderers, and him to be raised again, and to be the Prince of Life, by whom we are to attain life Eternal; and whose witnesses they profess themselves to be, and ready to endure the greatest torments for his sake? Though they were *ignorant and unlearned men*, they could not but know, that a little before their time *Judas of Galilee* and *Theudas*, who had attempted innovations, and drawn disciples after them, had soon perished in their designs, and their followers been brought to nought. They knew also the hatred and opposition of all the leading part of the Jews against their Master, when he was alive; and could not but foresee what a storm it would raise, to declare them guilty of his innocent blood. And moreover, if what they taught had been only a *cunningly devised Fable* of their own contrivance, they had reason to suspect that *some*
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of themselves, under such severe trials, might fall off and discover it, and then their design must have been utterly ruined: And yet none of all these very obvious considerations could discourage them, from prosecuting an undertaking, which they certainly knew must be attended with *bonds* and *imprisonment*, and all other dangers, even death it self. *None of these things moved them*, nor did they value their lives, so they might fulfil their Ministry. Now their success was answerable to their courage and integrity; for notwithstanding all possible human opposition was made to them, yet they went on and prevailed every day, converting great numbers where-ever they came; and in a few years, they went into the most considerable parts of the habitable world, and left behind them living and growing evidence, that they had been there, either in person or by faithful deputies, by the number of converts which they made both among Jews and Gentiles. And yet they did not arrogate any of this success to their own power, but only to the Grace of God which was with them, and to the evidence of those Miracles which he enabled them to work in the Name of *Christ*. For ^b *their preaching was not with*

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^b 1 Cor. ii. 4.

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*enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of Spirit and of Power, that the Faith, of those who believed, might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the Power of God; against which no human power or contrivance can be able to stand. St. Paul frequently mentions this evidence of the Power of God going along with them, in opposition to all the power and wisdom of the world; and says, with a sort of triumph, ^c Where is now the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. He hath made use of instruments, seemingly base and despised, that the mighty effects of their Doctrine should be ascribed only to his Power. Though St. Paul had a more learned education than all the rest of the Apostles, yet he declares, for himself as well as the rest, *We speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth.* He was concerned only to shew their sincerity in *manifestation of the Truth*; but he freely owns, *We have this treasure in earthen vessels,*
*that**

^c 1 Cor. i. 20, 27.

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that the excellency of the Power may be of God, and not of us. We need not be ashamed to confess, either to Jews or Gentiles, that the Apostles were neither Great Rabbies, nor learned Philosophers, but may own that they were mean and obscure persons: for though this was made an objection against their Doctrine, by such as were too much puffed up with these advantages to examine it, yet the objection, when granted, turns into a very strong Argument for that Doctrine which it was intended against. And therefore St. *Chrysostom*^d blames the inconsiderate weakness of a certain Christian in his time, whom he had once heard disputing with an Heathen in defence of St. *Paul*, and contending, that he was more learned and eloquent than *Plato*, whereas his adversary stiffly maintained the contrary. Each of these Disputants (says he) did really argue against his own Cause: For it was agreed that the success of St. *Paul's* Doctrine, and the numbers converted by it, was much greater than that of *Plato*. And therefore it could not depend upon human learning or eloquence, if *Plato* had so much the advantage in these accomplishments: but

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must

^d *Chrysost. Hom. 3. in 1 Ep. ad Corinth.*

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must be attributed to a more powerful cause. For it cannot well be denied, that so surprizing an event, as was that of the mighty spreading of the Gospel in so short a time, must be ascribed to something more than human, since it is acknowledged, that the most probable human means of doing it were wanting. But besides the speedy Manner of propagating the Gospel, we are to consider likewise;

2. The marvelous Effects which it had upon those who attended to it, where-ever it was propagated. It was not only entertained as a piece of news, or a matter of speculation, the thoughts of which would soon pass away, and be disregarded; but it had a deep and lasting influence, upon the lives and manners of those who entertained it. The Reformation which it wrought, both in the Principles and Practices of such as were converted to it, and the great courage and steadfastness with which they persisted in it, notwithstanding all possible human discouragements, is a strong argument that there was something more than human in it. I have, in a former Discourse^e, observed, how ineffectual the Reasonings of Philosophers were, towards the producing such a Reformation.

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a Reformation, either in Religion or Morality, as they could see was greatly wanted. How very few were those whom, with all their boasted learning and eloquence, they could persuade to abandon a vicious life, and steddily to embrace the practice of a strict and sincere virtue? to refrain from falling in with the most absurd Superstition and Idolatry, which they had once been accustomed to? or to make the constant belief of the Soul's Immortality, a prevailing principle of Action? But where-ever the Doctrine of the Gospel obtained, what a change did it presently work, both in the minds and behaviour of men? No sooner did they become Christians, but they presently forsook all their former vain conversation, and became quite other, or *new*, men; leading lives so innocent and virtuous, that they challenged their enemies to object any thing against them, but their professing the name of Christ, and renouncing all the Idolatry of their neighbours, as they did in spite of all opposition. How stedfastly did all ranks and degrees of them, (even such as the Gentile Philosophers thought too mean and illiterate to converse withal) maintain and profess the belief of another life, and a future judgment, and an eternal reward for blameless Souls,

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Souls, and punishment for the wicked and ungodly? With what constancy did they despise all the considerations of this world, which could be proposed to them, in comparison of an happy Resurrection? And how freely would they offer themselves to all manner of torments, and the most cruel kinds of death, rather than do any thing which might look like denying their *Saviour*, or renouncing their hope in him, from whom they expected this reward of Immortality? The Heathens were amazed at this, and called it *Obstinacy*^f, and punished them for it. But in other respects, they own'd that they had nothing criminal to charge them withal; as *Pliny*, in his letter to *Trajan*, testifies. This is a point which the Primitive Apologists insist very much upon, that no other institution of Philosophy or Religion could shew so much innocence and true virtue in practice. *Origen*^g not only affirms, that the Churches of Christ being

^f *Plin. Ep. 97. lib. x.*

^g Ἄτις ὁ Θεὸς Χριστῷ μαθητεύσας ἐκκλησίας, συνειζητήσας ταῖς αὐτῶν παρρηκῶσι δόμων ἐκκλησίαις, ὡς φασὶν εἶναι ἐν κόσμῳ, τίς γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ὁμολογήσας, καὶ τὰς χεῖρας τῷ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐκκλησίας, καὶ συλκείας βελιόγων ἐλάττης, πολλῶν κρείττης τυγχάνειν τῷ ἐν τοῖς δόμοις ἐκκλησιῶν; ἐκκλησία μὲν γὰρ τοῦ Θεοῦ, φέρει πῖν, ἢ Ἀθήνησι προεῖά τις καὶ δύσας—C. *Vide Orig. contra Cels. lib. 3. pag. 128, C.*

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being compared with other Communities of men, among whom they dwelt, in respect of their lives and manners, were as *lights in the world*; but he challenges his adversaries to examine the several ranks and degrees, or states and conditions of life, as common people, Senators, or chief Rulers of a *Christian Church*, and an *Heathen Community*, in such Cities as *Athens, Corinth, or Alexandria*, for instance, and compare them together, and then declare, whether even the worser sort of Christians, comparatively in each degree, did not far excel the very best Heathens of the like degree. Now this would hardly have been so constantly insisted upon, if the fact had not been past denial. ^h *Julian* himself, as great a *bigot* as he was to the *Heathen* superstition, yet fairly owns, that the sanctity of life, and exemplary charity of the Christians, had induced so many to despise the [Heathen] Gods, that if the Gentile Priests ever hoped to restore their ancient worship, they must endeavour to reform their own lives by their example.

Now that a few, poor, unlearned and plain men, destitute of all probable human assistance,
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^h *Juliani Epist. 49. ad Arfacium.*

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sent out separately, into several distant parts of the world, should in a few years bring over, to the same Faith in Christ, and obedience to him, vast numbers in every countrey where they came, of all ages, degrees and conditions of life, of different professions, persuasions and Religions, notwithstanding the prejudices of former Custom and Education, against all the Power, Interest, Authority and Learning of the world, and amidst all the malicious contrivances of Men and Devils, continually opposing and raising persecution against it; and that this Faith should make so deep an impression upon the minds of men, as immediately to change their Principles and Practices, and in a compendious manner, to make them shew such a true Philosophy in their lives and actions, and such a Constancy in adhering to it, even unto death, as the most learned among the Heathens, after much study, could do little more than talk of; These are such effects, as no considering and unprejudiced man, can easily deny to be the work of God. Therefore it must be concluded, either that the original of this Doctrine, and the Miracles by which it was confirmed, and by which the Apostles were enabled to plant and propagate it, were such as they are in Scripture repre-

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represented to be; or else, that this wonderful effect, of which the marks are still so plain and lasting, was produced in a manner, if possible, yet more miraculous; that is, without any such means at all. Now is it not really much more probable, as well as more agreeable, to all the accounts which History gives us of those times, that such Miracles were wrought at the first planting of the Gospel, and that divers of them continued to be wrought for a considerable time, (as we are told they did, till great numbers were every where convinced of the Power of the Spirit which went along with Christianity, and the prejudices of men against it were somewhat abated) than that it should gain such a strong and lasting establishment, as we see in fact it has done, contrary to all probable Human means, and yet be without such Divine evidence?

I observed, in the close of my last Discourse, that some of the ancient and bitter enemies of Christianity have, by their very way of writing against it, given Testimony to the Miracles of our Blessed Saviour, in point of fact, in ascribing them to magick, and setting up, in competition with them, strange feats said to have been done by *Pythagoras*, *Abaris*, *Aristeas*, or *Apollonius*, and the like. Now
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that which led them into this way of opposing Christianity was not, as I conceive, barely the relation which the Apostles give of the Miracles of Christ; but the notoriety of fact, that both the Apostles themselves, and many other Christians, for a considerable time after them, did continue to work Miracles in the name of *Jesus*: For *Origen*ⁱ, in many places, testifies, that divers miraculous powers did continue till his time. This the most inquisitive Heathens could not tell how to deny: And therefore to avoid the force of the Arguments which the Christians drew from thence, to prove that *Jesus* was a Divine Person, and his Doctrine from God, and to keep up the sinking credit of Gentile Philosophy, upon which they valued themselves among the people, some of them had recourse to these two Methods; which yet in the end turned to the establishment of the Gospel, and the utter confusion of Pagan Idolatry.

1. They raked together all the old stories, they could meet withal, of strange things done by some ancient Philosophers, or even Magicians and Impostors, to which they add new ones of their own, and these they set up in
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ⁱ Vide *Orig. contra Cels.* pag. 5, 34, 53, 124, 337, &c.

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opposition to the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles. To this purpose *Celsus*^k brings in the story of *Aristeas* from^l *Herodotus*, who tells us, he heard such a story told at *Proconnesus*, that *Aristeas* died there, but that his body could not be found, dead or alive, for seven years; but that afterwards he appeared and made verses, then disappeared again; and above three hundred years after was seen at *Metapontum*, where he ordered them to erect an Altar to *Apollo*, and a statue for himself close by it, telling them, he had once been the Crow which came with *Apollo* into *Italy*, and after he had said this he vanished again. To this *Celsus* adds the story of *Abaris*, riding in the air upon an arrow of *Apollo* over sea and land (as *Porphyry*^m also relates it) and of *Hermotimus Clazomenius*, whose Soul often left the body, and wandered up and down without it.

These strange stories *Celsus* makes a shew of believing; and so does *Hierocles* after him; who for the same purpose highly commends the life of *Apollonius Tyanæus*, writ by *Philostratus*. Now this way of arguing

^k *Orig. contra Cels. p. 125, &c.*

^l *Herod. lib. iv. cap. 13, 14.*

^m *De vita Pythag. Sect. 29.*

ing from these stories was this: ⁿ *If such great men as these, of whom such strange and wonderful things are related, are not worship'd as Gods, why should the Christians account JESUS a God, and pay him Divine Honour, only for having done such wonders as they relate of him?* This was the sum of their Argument, supposing the facts related of these famous men were believed to be true, as they pretended to think them. But it would have served their purpose as well, if they were false, provided they could but thereby have reduced the *Miracles* of *Jesus* to the same level with these impostures. And I make no question but it was with this view, that *Philostratus* writ the life of *Apolonius*; which he did, so many years after his death, that he might say what he pleased of him. And with the like design both *Porphry* and *Jamblichus* may be justly supposed to have writ the life of *Pythagoras*, so full

ⁿ Of this see Origen against Celsus in the third book at large; and the following words of Hierocles, in his book against the Christians, as they are preserved by Eusebius in his answer, are to the same purpose, Τίνος ἔν ἕνεκα τούτων ἐμνήσθην; ἵνα ἐξῇ συλκεῖν τὴν ἡμετέραν ἀρετὴν καὶ βεβαίαν ἐφ' ἑκάστῳ κρείσιν, καὶ τὴν Χριστιανῶν καφότηληα· εἴ ποτε ἡμεῖς μὴ τὸ τοιαῦτα πεποιηκότα, καὶ Θεὸν ἀλλὰ Θεοῖς κεχαρισμένοι ἀνδρες ἡγάμεθα· οἱ δὲ οὐδὲ ὀλίγας τεργεῖας τινὰς τὸ ἰσχυρὸν Θεὸν ἀναστροφύμενοι. Vide Euseb. contra Hieroclem. cap. 2.

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full of strange and absurd stories, that one could hardly think it possible for men of sense to tell them, with so grave and serious an air, as they do; unless it were to serve so malicious a purpose.

Now what say the Christian Apologists to all this? ° Why first they deny, that there was any competent evidence to prove those strange pretended facts; as there was for the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, which were attested at the time they were done, by such witnesses as, with the utmost constancy even unto death, affirmed them upon their own knowledge. And then in the next place, supposing some of them to have been true, they were very absurd and ridiculous; and if there was any thing more than the jugglings of crafty men in them, it was fit to be ascribed only to lying and wicked Spirits. Besides, they tended to no manner of good purpose, such as reforming the minds and manners of men, or reclaiming them from their Idolatry, to a more rational worship of the Supreme God; but the quite contrary. Nor did they pretend to be designed for any such

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° Of this see Origen's 3^d Book against Celsus, and Eusebius against Hierocles.

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good use by the Providence of God; nor were any of their Authors foretold by ancient Prophets, as *Jesus*, and the design of his coming into the world, was long before he came: Neither lastly, had they any such effect as followed from the Miracles and Doctrine of *Jesus*, by which such vast numbers in all places were brought to embrace a new and holy institution, and to adhere to it, forsaking their former wicked and superstitious customs, notwithstanding all human opposition made to the contrary. ^P For these reasons, and also because they saw some visible powers exercised in the Name of *Jesus*, they justly thought his doctrine to be the doctrine of God, and his miracles Divine works; but the others to be delusion. But then,

2. That the opposers of Christianity might seem to have something among them, like that

Ρ Τὶ μὲν γὰρ βεβλομένη ἡ πρόνοια τὰ πρὸς τὴν Ἀριστείαν ἀφ' ἧς ἀδόξα ἐποταγμὰ ἰδίῳ· καὶ τί ὠφελῆσαι τῷ ᾧ ἀνθρώπων ἡμί, τὰ τηλικαῦτα (ὡς οἱοί) ἐπεδείκνυτο, ἐκ ἔχουσιν λέγειν· ἡμεῖς δ', ἐπὶ τὰ πρὸς τὸ Ἰησοῦ διηγώμεθα, ὅτι τὴν τυχεύσαν φέρονται ἀπλογίαν πρὸς τὰ ταῦτα γεγονέναι, τὸ δὲ Θεὸν βεβλητῶς συστήσαι τὴν ἀφ' ἧς Ἰησοῦ ὡς σωτήριον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις λόγον· βεβαιώμενον μὲν τοῖς ἀπσόλοις ὡς περὶ θεμελίους τὴν κατεβαλλομένης οἰκοδομῆς τὸ χριστιανισμῶ, ἐπιδιδόντι δ' καὶ τῶν ἐξ ἡς χρόνους, ἐν οἷς ἐκ ὀλίγων θεωρεῖται τῷ Ἰησοῦ ὀνόματι, καὶ ἄλλαι τινες ἐπιφάνειαι ἐκ ἀκαταρρήτοις ἐπιτελεῖν. Orig. contra Cels. lib. 3. pag. 127.

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that power of the Spirit of God, whereof they saw some visible effects among believers, Many of the Philosophers themselves of that time, and some of *Julian's* great friends and acquaintance afterwards, betook themselves to the most Diabolical Superstition; Charming, Necromancy, Invocation of Dæmons; pretending to Divinations, Ecstasies, Inspirations; Nocturnal Visions and frequent conversings with their Gods and departed Heroes. These wicked and Enthusiastical practices they called *Theurgical*, as if there had been something Divine in them. And by this method they hoped to keep the old Gentile Idolatry in some credit; as whoever will take the pains to read and consider the lives of those Philosophers, written by *Eunapius* their great admirer; will easily see. But this pretence to something Supernatural, though it might for a time impose upon the ignorant and superstitious part of the Gentiles, could not bear up against the light of the Gospel. Nor could such works of the Devil endure the sight of the meanest Christian alive; nay, they complained, that the very Bodies of some of them, when dead, hindred all the Influence of their Gods from shewing itself. However both these Methods of opposing Christianity plain-

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ly shew, that the facts upon which it was founded were undeniable; and that they had nothing better to say against them, when they took such courses to defend their own Superstition, as the more ancient Philosophers of reputation (such as *Anaxagoras*, *Socrates*, *Plato*, *Xenophon* or *Aristotle*) would have been ashamed of.

Thus the wonderful manner in which Christianity was so speedily propagated, and the effects which for a long time followed it, are a standing argument of its truth and divinity, and give a more than Human testimony to the Revelation contained in holy Scripture.

If it should be alledged, that the great progress and large extent of *Mahometanism* is an objection to this way of arguing, since we do not allow that to have any thing divine in it: The answer, I think, is very obvious, That it is not the extent of worldly dominion, or the mere number of outward professors, upon which we lay the stress of this argument, but that inward conversion of the minds of men, which attended the Christian Doctrine, not only without, but contrary to, all human Power and Policy. *Mahomet* did not pretend to prove his doctrine by miracles, nor to reform the lives of men by it, but
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to form a worldly dominion upon the corruptions both of *Judaism* and Christianity: out of which he framed a doctrine to draw in both; of which he did not offer to convince men otherwise, than by worldly motives and the power of the sword. And 'tis no wonder that nominal Christians, and others, who had no real inward Religion, should come apace into such a doctrine as gratified their lusts, when it had once gotten an establishment. But did ever any of *Mahomet's* Disciples make such numbers of Converts out of the bounds of their own dominions, or where they and their profession were continually persecuted? So that if we consider the different manner and means of propagating Christianity, and the doctrine of *Mahomet*, it will plainly shew their different original. And as to the intrinsick excellence of the several doctrines, they will bear no comparison.

I shall now briefly add the second thing which I proposed in the beginning of this discourse; namely,

II. The successive accomplishment of Prophecies delivered by Christ and his Apostles.

I shall not here mention the prophecies of
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the Old Testament, relating to the Person of the *Messias*, and the time in which he lived upon Earth, and which were remarkably fulfilled in their season; because, though this be a good argument for the truth of the Christian Religion, and has accordingly been insisted upon by divers good Authors, yet it does not so properly come under the point which I am now upon. My design is only to mention some of those predictions which had their completion afterwards, and which are a sort of lasting miracle to succeeding ages, and a monument of Divine Power and Wisdom manifesting itself in the Gospel. For it must be own'd, that the certain foretelling of future contingent events, especially at a great distance, and such as have no antecedent probability, is an instance of Divine Wisdom. And in this sense, *the Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy*. I shall instance in such as these which follow.

1. He told his Disciples what should befall them after his Ascension into Heaven, as, That they should be endued with power from on high, after that the Holy Ghost was come upon them; That they should work great Miracles in his Name, such as healing the sick, casting out Devils, and speaking with
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new Tongues; That they should be brought before Kings and Rulers for his Name's sake; that they should be delivered up to be afflicted, and persecuted, and put to death, and should be hated of men for his sake; and yet notwithstanding all this opposition and ill treatment, which they were to meet with, he likewise foretold them what progress they should make, and that they should be witnesses unto him, not only in *Judæa* and *Samaria*, but even to the uttermost parts of the earth; and that for this purpose he would give them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries should not be able to gainsay or resist. Now whoever reads the *Acts of the Apostles*, and other genuine Remains of Antiquity, will find all these things eminently fulfilled.

2. The Destruction of *Jerusalem* was very particularly foretold by our Saviour, with abundance of very remarkable circumstances which were to attend it; as to the time, that it should be before that generation was all dead, but yet not till the Gospel was first published into all parts of the world; as to the signs foregoing it, that there should be wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines and pestilences, that there should also arise false Christ's and false Prophets, who

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should deceive many; that there should be fearful sights and great signs in the Heavens attending it; and by particular marks and tokens of approaching vengeance, his true Disciples had warning given, by flight, to escape that dreadful calamity. As to the Destruction itself, he foretold that it should be the most terrible and amazing of all that ever befel any City, or People, insomuch that of their famous Temple, which had been so long in building, there should not be left one stone upon another, which should not be thrown down. The circumstances of this Prophecy are so particular, and the fulfilling all of them so remarkable, that whoever reads the History of this great calamity, in *Josephus*, and compares it with our Saviour's Prediction, in the Evangelists, cannot fail of acknowledging the just vengeance of God upon that obstinate generation, for rejecting and crucifying their *Messias*, and must at the same time own it for a signal evidence of that Divine Spirit by which he spake, and of the truth of his doctrine.

3. The dispersion of that people after the ruine of their City and Government, was likewise plainly foretold, (*Luke 21. 24.*) *There shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon*

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upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentile be fulfilled. Now the state of the Jews is, to this day, a standing evidence of the Truth of this Prophecy, they being by the Providence of God kept a distinct people, from all those among whom they are dispersed, which cannot be said of any other ancient nation; and yet they have been often oppressed and persecuted, hated and despised where-ever they came; but not yet suffered to return to their own land, to set up their ancient worship in it, though they have several times attempted it. ^r *Julian* himself (perhaps out of spite to this Prophecy, or at least out of hatred to the Christians) promised them in a letter, to restore their *Holy City* and Worship: And we are told, that he sent *Alypius* with a commission to see this design executed, and to lay out a prodigious sum upon rebuilding the Temple, ^f but that, *when*
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^r *Vide Juliani. Ep. 25. Ed. Spanheim.*

^f *Cum itaque rei idem fortiter instaret Alypius, juvaretque provinciæ rector, metuendi globi flammæ prope fundamenta crebris assultibus erumpentes, fecere locum, exustis aliquoties operantibus, inaccessum: hocque modo, elemento*

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he set about the work in earnest, terrible balls of fire broke out about the foundation, which several times destroyed the workmen, and made the place inaccessible, so that the design was forced to be entirely laid aside.

This account we have not only from Christian Writers, and enemies of *Julian*, but from *Ammianus Marcellinus*, one of his great admirers. *Jerusalem* still continues trodden down of the Gentiles; that is, in subjection and bondage to such as are not Jews by profession or extraction: and so it is likely to continue, till the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled, or till the Gospel has had its full course among them. And thus, as the Gospel was first published among all nations before this wonderful dispersion of the Jews, as it were for a Testimony against them where-ever they should be scattered; so they were soon sent after it, to be a continual and living monument of the Truth of it, among all people where they dwell.

4. The progress of Christianity, and the state of the Christian Church, was likewise foretold, both by our Saviour in divers of his parables, and in other express declarations, and

mento destinatus repellente, cessavit inceptum. Vide *Ammiani Marcelli. lib. 23. cap. 1.*

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and likewise farther by his Apostles in their writings; as, That it should be every where persecuted at first, and yet should every where prevail, and from small beginnings, like a grain of mustard seed, should grow into a great Tree: That the *Gentiles* should be called into it, and the *Jews* for a time reject it: That in the latter days there should be grievous Corruptions in the Church, in many particular instances, which have already been sadly verified.

Now though it should be owned, that some of the things foretold were not unlikely to happen, as that the Apostles should be persecuted, and that the Gospel should meet with great opposition, considering how Christ himself was treated, and how contrary his doctrine was to the corruptions of men; yet all of them were things contingent; and the Apostles might not thus have exposed themselves, if the thing had been of men. But their success was so unlikely, and so were most of the other things foretold, that as nothing but Divine wisdom could foresee them, so nothing but Divine power could bring them to pass.

As for those Prophecies concerning a better State of the Christian Church, the fulness of the *Gentiles* coming in to the profession
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of the Gospel, the conversion of the *Jews*, the destruction of *Antichrist*, the prevailing power of the Gospel, and others, whose time of accomplishment is yet future; though we cannot at present make use of them as arguments against Unbelievers; yet as those who believe the Scriptures justly expect that these Prophecies will all be fulfilled, in their season, so when the time of their fulfilling comes, they will be a successively growing evidence of the Truth and Divinity of the Christian Doctrine, such as no imposture can shew.

And now from what I have said upon this Subject, I hope, it will appear, that, over and above a more certain Historical evidence of facts related in the New Testament, than can be expected for any mere human record so ancient, we have also subsequent instances of Divine Power, giving attestation to the Christian Revelation, and instances of Divine Wildom and Fore-knowledge, appearing in that Revelation it self, and manifested to be such by their accomplishment. And if this be not such a powerful means of conviction, as they had who saw the Miracles of our Saviour, and heard his Doctrine, who were witnesses of his death, and conversed with him after he rose from the dead, who beheld his

Ascen-

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Ascension into Heaven, and were themselves made partakers of the miraculous Powers of the Holy Ghost, by virtue whereof they planted this Doctrine in the world; yet at least it is such an evidence of the Truth of what they affirmed, as is impossible to be counterfeited; but the more it is examined, the stronger it will appear. And therefore we are inexcusable if we refuse to embrace a Doctrine of such infinite moment, and which comes to us so divinely recommended.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord himself, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him: God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will.





S E R M O N XVI.

Preached *November* the 3^d 1718.

St. *Luke* vii. 23.

*And Blessed is he, whosoever shall not
be offended in Me.*



Hese words are the Conclusion of that Answer which our Saviour returned to the Message of *John* the Baptist, who sent two of his Disciples to him with this Question, *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* It appears evident, from other passages in the Gospel, that *John* himself did not want an answer to this Question, for his own satisfaction;

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faction; for he knew already that *Jesus* was the *Christ*; and his Disciples own, ^a *that he bare witness to him*. But they, it seems, were unwilling to believe this, and were offended, that the fame of *Jesus* should thus eclipse that of their Master; though this was no more than what he had foretold, when he said of *Jesus*, ^b *He must increase, but I must decrease*. And therefore to cure them of this prejudice, *John* sends them to *Jesus* himself, for their farther conviction. Our Saviour knowing the occasion of their coming, did, *in the same hour*, as the Evangelist tells us, *cure many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil Spirits, and to many that were blind he gave sight*. And then he sent them away, not with a direct answer in words to their question, for that would have been only his own witness to himself; but with a Message which implied more than a direct answer, namely, an evident proof from his Miracles, that he was the person they enquired about. *Go, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the Gospel is preached*. He knew that by this Message

John

^a *John* iii. 26.

^b *John* iii. 30.

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John the Baptist, who himself did no Miracles, might have a fair opportunity to convince them, even out of the ancient Prophets; that these miraculous works were the marks of him *that should come*, and that they needed not *look for another*. However, in conclusion, he adds, *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me*: Which words may seem to imply a tacit reproof to them; for their former unreasonable prejudice against him, and a caution to beware of the like for the future. Or if we take the words as a general proposition, expressing the happiness of those who are so honest and impartial, in the search of Truth, as to lay aside all prejudices, and to overcome all temptations which might hinder the sincere embracing of it, they plainly intimate that, notwithstanding all the evidence of Miracles which our Saviour gave of his being sent from God, yet there would be some, either so perverse, as obstinately to resist his Doctrine out of worldly prejudice, or so weak, as in time of temptation to be offended at it, and fall away from the profession of it.

I have, in a former Discourse ^c, endeavour-
ed to shew the reasonableness of expecting

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some Revelation from God, considering the general State and Condition of mankind. And^d I have likewise considered the nature of that evidence which we have from Miracles, that the Christian Religion is founded upon such a Revelation. In doing of which, I hope, I have also prevented all objections against the truth of the facts upon which it is founded, by shewing, that we have sufficient grounds of assurance for them, notwithstanding they were done so long before our time. And admitting the facts, or miracles, to be true, I have shewn that there can be no just pretence for refusing to submit to their evidence; unless it can be proved, that there is something in the Doctrine or Revelation, thus attested, which makes it incapable of any proof; that is, something plainly unworthy of God, and repugnant to his Nature and known Attributes, so that the Doctrine and the Testimony would contradict one another: From which imputation I have all along supposed the Christian Doctrine, delivered in Scripture, to be free; and shall now endeavour, briefly to shew the reasonableness of such a Supposition, by taking occasion, from these words of our Saviour,

^d *Serm. xiv. and xv.*

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Saviour, to consider some of those prejudices or grounds of offence, which some men take at the Christian Revelation, either upon account of the Person or Doctrine of its Author, and from which they would seem to persuade themselves, that it is such a dispensation or institution, as is not sufficiently suitable to Divine wisdom; and therefore that they may be excused if they neglect or disregard it.

But before I proceed to the particulars, I cannot well avoid taking notice of one general Observation, which may very properly be made upon much the greatest part of the objections against the Christian Revelation: which is this; That they very much resemble those objections, which Atheistical men make against a Providence of God, Making and Governing the Natural world, from some suppos'd defects and blemishes in the frame and order of it. For as these men vainly imagine, that if they had had the management of all things, they would have made the world after another fashion, and have prevented abundance of faults and inconveniences, which they now pretend to espy in it; so the others fancy, that if they had been to frame an Institution of Religion for mankind, it should have been liable to none of these objections, but should, without

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any difficulty, have been approved by the reason of all men. But now, as in the one case, those, who have studied the great volume of Nature with most exactness, and gone farthest into the reasons and dependencies of one thing upon another, have found out many things to be great Beauties in the whole, and of excellent use; and therefore admire the deep wisdom and contrivance of their Author, in those very things, which others, less curious, have taken for Deformities, because of their own ignorance of those admirable purposes to which they are designed: So in the other case, those who have studied the books of Holy Scripture with the greatest care, and considered the Christian Oeconomy, in all its parts, with the utmost diligence, have alway most admired both the Divine Wisdom and Goodness which is discoverable, in many of those instances, which others, not considering the relation between God and Man, nor viewing the correspondence which one part of the Divine Dispensation has to another, make to be objections against them. Some of these I shall now proceed to mention:

I. As to the Person thus declaring the will of God to man; his mean and low condition in the world, his suffering state, and especially

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ly his ignominious death, has been sometimes urged as a great objection: and it was matter of great offence at first both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*. But considering the design upon which he came into the world, this is a very unreasonable prejudice; and proceeds purely from too great a value for the outward things of this world, and too little concern, and too low an opinion of a Future state; to rectify which mistaken notions of things, was one great end of his coming. If the *Jews* would have consulted their own Scriptures impartially, they might have known, that many of their own Prophets and holy men, whom they acknowledged to have been Messengers of God, were men of suffering, and grievously persecuted, sometimes even unto death; and farther they might have known, from those very Prophets who foretold his coming, that he was to be a *man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*, and that *his soul*, or life, was to be made an offering for sin. This therefore ought not to have offended them. The *Gentiles* also might have learned, from some of their most esteemed Philosophers, That outward pomp and greatness, power and riches of the world, are rather to be despised than admired, by a truly great and wise man; That

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no good man is the less beloved of God, for being placed in a state of poverty and contempt, as *Epicetus*, and other excellent persons were; or for being hated and put to death, by his Fellow-citizens, as *Socrates*, one of the brightest instances of Heathen virtue, was; That the most eminent examples of virtue, and such as were fittest to teach and reform the world, had been such as were tried in the furnace of affliction; That misery and suffering, is so far from being inconsistent with the greatest Virtue and Goodness, that according to *Plato's* reasoning (in the person of *Glauco* ^e) to make the character of a truly Righteous man unquestionably perfect, he must be stript of all things in the world, even of the credit and reputation of being a Righteous man;

^e Τὸν δίκαιον ἰσῶμεν τῷ λόγῳ, ἄνδρα ἀπλὴν καὶ ἡλικίῳ, καὶ ἄιχύνῳ, ὃς δοκεῖν ἀλλ' εἶναι ἀγαθὸν ἐθέλοντα. Ἀφαιρετέον δὲ τὸ δοκεῖν, εἰ γὰρ δόξει δίκαιος εἶναι, ἔσονται αὐτῷ τιμαὶ καὶ δαρεαί, δοκῶντι τοιούτῳ εἶναι ἀδελφὸν ἢν ἔτε ὅτ' δικάει, ἔτε ὅτ' δαρεῶν τε καὶ τιμῶν ἕνεκα, τοιούτῳ εἶη· γυμναστέον δὲ πάντων, πᾶσι δίκαιοσυνῆς, καὶ ποιητέον ἐναντίας ἀφαιρέμενον τὰ περιέξω (ἀδίκῳ sc.) μηδὲν γὰρ ἀδίκων, δόξαν ἔχεται ὅτ' μεγίστη ἀδικίας· ἵν' ἡ βεβαιότης εἰς δικαιοσύνην τὰ μὴ τέλεια ὑπὸ κακοδοξίας, καὶ ὅτ' ὑπὸ αὐτῆς γιγνομένων· ἀλλ' ἦτω ἀμελείας αὐτοῦ μέχρι θανάτου· δοκῶν μὲν εἶναι ἀδικῶς ἀλλὰ βίῃ, ὣν ὅτ' δίκαιος—— ἐξῆσι δὲ τὰδε ὅτι ὅτ' αὐτῷ ἀφαιρέμενον ὁ δίκαιος μασιγώσεται, σφραλίσει, διδύσει, ἐκκαυθήσεται τῷ φθαλμῷ· τελευτῶν, πάντα κακὰ παθὼν, ἀναχινδύλοισι. *Plato. de Repub. lib. 2. pag. 361.*

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man; because if he be thought a just person, by the world, Honour and worldly advantage will be his portion, and then it cannot be known, whether it be real virtue, or the advantages of it, which he pursues; he must therefore be reckoned wicked and unjust, while he retains the strictest justice and integrity unshaken, even unto death—and then the consequence of this will be, (even in the opinion of those who follow only the appearances of virtue or justice) that such a just man will be exposed to all manner of suffering and ill-treatment, and at last be put to a cruel death, or crucified. Now if this be the utmost pitch of real virtue, and not pretended, then certainly the suffering state of our Saviour, ought not in Reason to be an offence, to those who consider him as a person coming to give the most perfect example of the most difficult virtues: And especially one who comes to teach men to expect another life after this, in comparison of which all the sufferings of this world would vanish, and be as nothing. For could any state of life be more proper to teach men this, than that which he voluntarily took upon him? Or could he more effectually recommend humility, patience, contempt of the world, and obedience to the

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will of God, even unto death, any other way than this? If suffering unjustly was that which brought the greatest Glory to the Characters of divers eminent persons, even in the Pagan world, it ought not by them to have been thought unworthy of God, to *make the Captain of our Salvation perfect through sufferings.*

2. It has likewise been alledged, as a prejudice against him, that he should promise eternal life to his followers, who was not able to rescue himself from temporal death. But this prejudice supposes him not to have died upon choice but necessity, as it is supposed that none of those great men of former times, who are celebrated for being willing to suffer death, rather than stain their character of virtue, would have chosen this part, if both their life and their character could have been preserved together: and therefore if he had not power enough to do both these, why should we, say they, believe him able to make good such a promise, as none of those great men or Philosophers ever offered to make? This objection, I say, supposes, that he had not power both *to lay down his own life, and to take it again,* as he declares he had. And that he really had this power, he gave this plain demonstration

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monstration in fact, that he rose again from the dead. Now could any instance possible be given more proper to convince men, that he had power to raise others, and make good his promise of giving them eternal life, than this raising of himself from death? This is an evidence which needs no long deductions of reasoning to make it good; but is plain to every capacity that owns his Resurrection; of which we have such assurance from a sufficient number of competent witnesses, as makes it impossible for any reasonable man to deny it. If his voluntary suffering of death therefore, besides the other great ends of it, carries his example as far as possible, his Resurrection secures us of the Truth of all his Promises. But,

3. That he should likewise be declared to be the Son of God, who thus suffered and died for mankind, is what some are yet more offended at. So great a Condescension in God Almighty, seems to them unbecoming the Divine Majesty, and is therefore incredible. As in one case they object against the state of his Humiliation, so here they object against the Dignity of his Person. This prejudice arises from hence, that the goodness of God in this dispensation, and his love to mankind is

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is so far above their conception. And yet these very men would sometimes persuade us to have such an unreasonable opinion of the Divine goodness, as quite to destroy all notions of his Justice. They would rather suppose him never capable of being displeased with the greatest wickedness of mankind, than to be reconciled upon such terms, as are so much above their comprehension. But now certainly, though no human understanding was able to find out such a method of reconciling these Attributes of God to each other, yet being made known to us by God himself, it must needs appear, to all reasonable and unprejudiced persons, a method of infinite Wisdom, thus to provide an Expiation for the sins of men, in a way satisfactory to his infinite Justice, asserting the Honour of his laws, and declaring his perfect hatred of all sin, and yet at the same time consistent with an infinite Goodness and Compassion to sinful men.

This gives us a full assurance of the mercy of God, upon Our true Repentance, and a just ground of hope, that our sins are forgiven, through the merits of Christ. Which full assurance we could not have had, upon such sufficient grounds, without a plain Revelation
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from God; because, though men should naturally have the highest thoughts of the Divine Goodness, yet considering how much every thinking man must needs be conscious to himself of his own unworthiness of such goodness, by reason of his manifold transgressions of the Law of Nature, he could never otherwise be free from great doubting and uncertainty about it. And much less could he entertain any certain hope of an Eternal Reward from a Being so justly offended at him. It seems indeed to have been a general notion of mankind, That God would admit of some sort of expiation for Sin, which occasioned so universal a practice of sacrificing; but that any sacrifice which man could offer should be a valuable consideration for this purpose, cannot easily be conceived. But when we are once assured that God has provided himself such an all-sufficient sacrifice, we can then see a reason why he suffered such an universal opinion to prevail. And we can farther argue, with St. Paul, *‘He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* And though
this

^f Rom. 8. 32.

this method of Redemption argues an infinite condescension, in Almighty God to his Creatures, which of right they could neither claim nor expect, yet this ought not to offend us : for since he intimately takes care of every part of his Creation, we ought not to think any rational creature below his notice ; nor are we to imagine, that his ways of caring for them are only like ours. It is unreasonable to measure his infinite goodness by our shallow conceptions of it. We ought rather to admire the deep wisdom of it, and to own, with the Apostle, that *it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

4. It is objected, that we cannot comprehend the manner, in which the Divine and Humane Nature are united in the person of our Redeemer. But certainly this ought no more to be a prejudice against the belief of it, when it is revealed to us, and that Revelation well attested by God, than the union of Soul and Body in our selves, though we know not the manner of it, can hinder us from being fully convinced of the thing by its

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its effects. And that this partaking of the Divine and Human Nature renders him a proper Mediator and Intercessor, with God for man, cannot reasonably admit of any dispute.

5. The time of our Saviour's coming into the world is sometimes objected against, as if it had been too long delayed, supposing it ever to have been necessary, or even so highly beneficial to mankind as is pretended. But this objection cannot be made by any one, who does not pretend to be as competent a judge of the fitness of the time, as God Almighty. And it has been by some observed to be much like the Atheists objection against God's making of the world, That if he had made it at all, he would surely have made it sooner. And yet by the very nature of the thing, if it ever was created, that is, ever had a beginning, there must have been a time when it was just so near that beginning, or was just of the same age, as it is now supposed to be. So that this objection is either of no force at all, or the world must never have been created, that is, it must have been from Eternity; against which there are yet greater objections. And therefore it is much more reasonable to suppose, that he who made it
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knew the fittest time. So he who sent his Son into the world, for the salvation of mankind, and to reveal his will by him, best knew the proper time to send him. Not that men were utterly destitute of the mercy of God, or of all means of salvation, who lived before his coming in the flesh, as the objection must suppose, if it have any force in it; for the promise of salvation, by him, is near upon as old as the first transgression; and the effects of his propitiation have respect to times past, as well as future. And since, by the Divine Dispensation, he was to appear once for all, we may, without contradicting any principle of Reason, suppose the time, in which he did appear, to have been the fittest. But this is not all that may be said to induce us to approve of it. For we may also discover several instances of such fitness, (though we cannot pretend to know them all) which make that time, in which he did come, appear to have been very proper: as for instance, That it was when men stood in the greatest need of such a Revelation as he came to make, being, by degrees, sunk into the utmost corruption both of Religion and Morality; When divers other means of reforming them had quite lost their effect; When

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Philosophy, upon mere principles of Reason, had in vain attempted to reclaim them, and confess'd itself unable to do it without farther instruction and assistance from Heaven; When the world had been prepared by ancient Prophets, for a long time, to expect his coming; And when the outward state of the world was such, as to make his coming the most beneficial, the Providence of God having gradually disposed all things for it, so that his doctrine might have the best opportunity both of being known and examined, that men might not be said to be surprized into it. These and divers other instances of the fitness of that season, in which he appeared, have been more largely treated of by those who discourse concerning *the fulness of Time in which God sent his Son into the world*, and therefore I do but just mention them.

6. Not much unlike, to this objection of time, is that of the place, or people, among which he appeared. ^h *Celsus* thought it a ridiculous thing to imagine, That God should send his Son among the *Jews*, an obscure and despised people; he ought not, in his opinion, to have confined him to such a small corner

^h *Vide Orig. contra Cels. pag. 329.*

corner of the world, but to have inspired more like him, and have sent them into all parts of the world. And the like objection is still urged by some against the Christian Revelation, or indeed against the necessity of believing any Revelation at all to be useful. If it was either necessary or intended for any great good to men, it ought, they say, to have been universal. And this want of universality they think to be a sufficient reason for rejecting it. But now, if the foundation of this objection, or prejudice, against the Christian Revelation were good, it would prove farther than these men pretend; for, as has been observed by others,ⁱ it would
 prove

ⁱ Dr. Clarke of *the Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, p. 216. Now, says he, (not to take notice here, that it is by no means impossible, but all men may be capable of receiving some benefit from a Revelation, which yet a great part of them may never have heard of;) If these mens reasoning was true, it would follow, by the same argument, that neither was Natural Religion necessary to enable men to answer the ends of their creation. For, though all the truths of Natural Religion are indeed certainly discoverable by the due use of right reason alone; yet 'tis evident, All Men are not endued with the same Faculties and Capacities, nor have they all equally afforded to them the same means of making that discovery; as these Gentlemen themselves upon some occasions are willing enough to own, when they are describing the barbarous Ignorance of some poor Indian Nations. And consequently the
 knowledge

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prove against all the obligations of Natural Religion, which it is certain all men have not equal means or abilities of knowing and cultivating. And the same way of arguing would prove, that God ought to have made, not only all nations of men, but even all particular men, equal in all other respects, both of faculties and opportunities of improvement, that they might all be capable of equal degrees of happiness. But as God was under no obligation to make all his Creatures of one rank; so neither was he obliged to make all men of the same condition; nor to give them all the same kind or degree of happiness; nor consequently to afford the same means of knowledge to all equally. Revelation is an act of favour, which, though such as were well disposed to receive it, and were sensible of the want of it, had good grounds to hope for, yet it could not of right be demanded: that is, God was not obliged

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knowledge of Natural Religion being in fact by no means universal; it will follow, that there is no great necessity even of That; but that men may do very well without it, in performing the functions of the animal Life, and directing themselves wholly by the inclinations of sense. And thus these Gentlemen must at last be forced to let go all Moral Obligations, and so recur unavoidably to absolute Atheism.

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to make it equally to all men. God has indeed been so far good to all men, as to give them some means of knowing him, and by that has laid them under an obligation of seeking after him, and likewise (as I have formerly^k shewn) of inquiring, whether he has made any farther particular Revelation of his will, and of being ready to embrace it upon good evidence. And if they do this sincerely, they will either find where that Revelation is, or not be condemned for the want of it, where they have no possible means of finding it. But, by the way, those who make this objection, cannot be of the number of those who want these means; because they must have heard of the Revelation, before they could take this offence at it; and therefore may be justly condemned for ungratefully rejecting such a gracious offer, upon so weak a pretence. For is it not unreasonable to despise a favour offered to our selves, only because we know not the reason why it has not yet been offered to some others? Though it may in time be offered to all that are found worthy of it.

And then as to the Place where the Gospel

^k *Serm. x. and xii.*

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pel first began to be preached; if it be allowed reasonable, that the Author of it should be a real Man, his Birth and Conversation, his Life and Death, and Resurrection must be in some particular country, though the influence of his doctrine may reach to all that are willing to receive it. And why should not *Judæa* be that country, as well as any other? Human Prejudice may prefer others, as all Nations are partial to themselves; but God, who sees not as man sees, knows the fittest place, as well as time, for opening his dispensations towards man; and since he chose this, we ought to acquiesce in it. Not but that an unprejudiced man may observe some reason for the choice. For in this place alone the knowledge of the One True God had been preserved, while all other nations had worship'd false Gods. Here were kept the ancient Oracles of God, and the writings of the Prophets; which had testified before of his coming: here therefore were the evidences kept, whereby it could be most easily proved, that he was the person designed and sent by God. And there was no necessity that he should appear bodily in other nations, since the Truth and Divinity of his doctrine being once thus e-

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stablish'd, the benefits of it are not confined to this, which *Celsus* in contempt calls a *Corner of the World*: but his Apostles were sent out into all countries, with the power of his *Spirit*, to convince the Gentile world, that by him salvation is come to them also, if they will receive it. And it is offer'd to all in such a way as to leave room for the tryal of their virtue and sincerity, in admitting or rejecting it; assistance being offer'd, but no force put upon the freedom of human Will in it. And this is indeed by some made an objection against the whole Oeconomy of Man's Salvation, That God did not rather prevent all Sin and evil from entring into the world at first, or at least when it had entered, rather root it out all at once, than take such a slow method for the cure of it. Why was such a reformation, say they, suffer'd to be necessary? But as this objection would destroy the original liberty of Human actions, and take away the foundation of all virtue, as well as vice: so it is not level'd only against the Wisdom of God in Man's Redemption, but against his Providence in general, of which, in the present case, I suppose men to be already convinced; and therefore shall
not

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not resume the arguments for it, which are common to all who believe a wise and good Providence governing the World.

But besides the prejudices which men take at the *Person* of our Saviour, the *Time*, and *Place*, and *Manner* of his appearing in the world; they likewise take offence at his *Doctrine*, which by some is accused for being too *Plain*, by others for being too *Sublime* and *Mysterious*. Sometimes the Preceptive part of it is represented as *deficient*, sometimes too *rigorous* and severe; and, upon the whole, it is objected, that, in fact and experience, it does not appear *effectual* enough to secure the end it proposes.

1. It is accused of too great *Plainness* and *Simplicity*. The *Greeks*, or *Gentile* Philosophers, *sought after wisdom*, expected things should be proved to them in a philosophical way, and delivered with all the advantages of Human Art and Eloquence; but instead of this, they met with a plain and artless narration of an unexpected matter of fact; of the life and miracles, the death, and sufferings, and resurrection of *Jesus Christ*. And they are directed to obey his precepts, and to believe in him as the Author of life, and Judge of the world. This to them *seems foolish-*

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ness. But is not this in truth an high commendation of this Doctrine, that it should prove a matter of such high importance, by an argument so level to all capacities, as that of Christ's Resurrection was, for proving the truth of what he taught, particularly, concerning the Resurrection, and a Future State? Their way of teaching, look'd as if they thought only men of learning and leisure worth taking notice of; but Divine wisdom is more universally beneficent, and respects not men according to these outward advantages. And then for the Preceptive part of this Doctrine, though it be plain and short, yet it is delivered, as laws ought to be, in Terms of Authority, giving the most excellent Rules of life, that are any where to be met withal; and adding the greatest sanction to them, by setting before men the highest rewards and punishments, for the observance or non-observance of them. What can be more worthy of God than a Doctrine so plain, and yet so full and perfect, reaching to the very thoughts and intentions of the heart? I am afraid the true reason of mens prejudice to this plainness, is, that it awakens their own Consciences too much against them, that it would be the most effectual means of re-
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forming them, but that they *hate to be reformed.*

2. The Doctrine of Christianity is sometimes represented as too *sublime* and mysterious, declaring to us things above our comprehension; and for that reason some men are prejudiced against it. I shall not mention particulars, because they have been subjects often treated of by others, in particular Discourses. I shall only observe in general, that if a Revelation from God, is necessary to teach us any thing, concerning the Divine nature, and his designs towards mankind, and in relation to a Future State, more than what we could naturally know before, it must of necessity be something which our Reason could not discover; and as far as the nature of an Infinite Being is concerned in it, it must exceed our finite Capacities, by the very nature of things: And yet the Belief of it when so revealed, may be very reasonable, so long as it implies no contradiction. And indeed, it would be a much greater prejudice against a Revelation's being from God, if it had no marks in it of any thing, but what human reason could have discovered without it.

3. Though the Morality of the Christian Doctrine, has been generally allowed to excel

cel all others in perfection, yet there are not wanting, some who seem to tax it with *deficiency*. An Author, whom I have formerly mention'd, in his high admiration of *Epicurean Friendship*¹, tells us, that *we Christians ought to have an higher veneration of Epicurus for this virtue of Friendship than Cicero*^m, *because even our Holy Religion itself does not any where particularly require of us that virtue*. This hint he took from another Authorⁿ, who has insinuated, that *some of the most Heroick virtues have little notice taken of them in our Holy Religion; and particularly that Private Friendship and Zeal for the Publick and our Countrey, are virtues purely voluntary in a Christian. They are no essential parts of his Charity. And they would both seem to defend this strange kind*

¹ Discourse of Free-Thinking, pag. 130.

^m By the way, this Author would either impose upon us, or is grossly mistaken himself, in what he there quotes out of Cicero: because it is the Epicurean who speaks in that passage, and not Cicero himself, who in many places declares, that upon Epicurean principles there could be no such thing as Friendship. See his Offices, lib. 1. cap. 2. De Amicitia. cap. 13. De Finib. II. 24. &c. III. 21. and De Nat. Deor. lib. 1. 44. and elsewhere.

ⁿ Characteristicks, in the Essay on Freedom of Wit and Humour, pag. 98.

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kind of Reasoning, from the Concession of an Eminent Divine, who owns, that the word *Friendship*, in their sense, is not to be found in the New Testament; which though it be true, is nothing to their purpose, but very much the contrary. By *Friendship*, they tell us, *is not meant that common Benevolence and Charity, which every Christian is obliged to shew towards all men, and in particular towards his Fellow Christians, his Neighbour, Brother and Kindred of whatever degree; but that peculiar Relation, which is formed by a Consent and Harmony of Minds, by mutual esteem, and reciprocal tenderness and affection; and which we emphatically call Friendship.* But now is such a Relation, in itself, abstracted from those mutual good offices, by which it is cultivated, any virtue? surely no more than Brotherhood, or Neighbourhood, or Acquaintance, or a similitude of Studies or Education, which are not always in our own power. But those offices which adorn this Relation, which alone are the virtues of it, are commanded by the Christian Law, which obliges us to every thing that is *virtuous and praise worthy*, or even of *good report*, and, in the most disinterested manner, to do good where we hope for no return. We
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are commanded to *be of the same mind one towards another*, and to perform all the offices of *mutual affection and benevolence*: And when this happens to be more remarkably done between a few, then it is called *Friendship*: but then it is only limiting those Expressions of kindness and goodwill to some particulars, which the Christian Doctrine commands more universally to every one that is capable of receiving them. There is not any particular office of this admired *Friendship*, but what is more eminently contained in St. Paul's character of *Charity*. And whoever reads the New Testament will find, that to love our Neighbours as our selves, which is the great Mark of a Christian, comprehends all the offices of kindness which one man can owe to another in any relation. And that there are occasions on which we *ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*, which is as far as any Rational Friendship can pretend to go. A Friendship built upon any principles, distinct from those which Christian Charity commends, is so far from being a great virtue, that it is nothing else but a *want of social affection* to the rest of mankind. And the like may be said for the *love of our country*, which can never be a virtue, but when it proceeds

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proceeds upon a principle of universal benevolence, and a *zeal* to do the greatest good we can to men. But, I hope, I need not dwell upon so unreasonable a prejudice.

4. On the other hand, some are offended at the Christian Doctrine, because the precepts of it are too *severe*. It commands us to mortify all our lusts and passions, and to deny our selves to a great degree, and to part with all things, even life it self, rather than deny or renounce Christ and his Gospel. This, our Saviour knew, and foretold, would be a great prejudice to worldly men, and that when *persecution should arise because of the word they would presently be offended*. But it is not therefore a just objection, against its being a Doctrine worthy of God. For as to the strictness of its precepts, in respect of *denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in the world*; and the restraining all evil thoughts and desires, as well as words and actions, it is what will approve it self to be just and right, to the calmest reason of mankind. And there is no duty of life enjoined in it, but what some or other, even of the best Heathen Philosophers, have upon occasion commended as most noble, and best becoming a truly virtuous mind;

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mind; though they have not always constantly insisted upon them. And as for the obligation of suffering for the sake of Christ, when we are called to it, it is abundantly compensated by the promise of Grace and Assistance, and by that clear discovery of a Future Reward, which the Gospel has promised to all that obey it. This makes it highly reasonable in respect of our Lawgiver and Judge, who has provided such an infinite Reward for us: And it may likewise be the most generous way of doing good to mankind, thus to offer up our lives to maintain the truth of that Revelation, which is so *worthy of all men to be received*. But if Mr. Hobbes's doctrine were true, (*viz.* that ° *at the command of the Magistrate, a man may lawfully deny Christ with his mouth, because then the action is not his that denies him, but his sovereign's.*) As this Revelation, so highly beneficial to mankind, could never at first have been propagated in the world, so it could never long subsist in it, if the powers of the world should think fit to forbid it, as they did at the first. And upon the same foot any other Truths may be destroyed, if no man be obliged,

° *Leviathan, Part. 3. ch. 43. p. 271.*

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obliged, either in honour or conscience, to maintain them.

5. It is farther objected, That the Doctrine of the Gospel has not proved so effectual as it ought to have done, if it had been from God. Christians, they say, are greatly divided, though the Gospel pretend to be a doctrine of the greatest Unity and Peace; and they are many of them very corrupt in their lives and practices, though they affirm, it affords much greater assistances towards purity and holiness of Life, as well as stricter precepts, than any other institution. This, I confess, is a sore reflection upon such as call themselves Christians, which it highly concerns every one of them to do all he can to confute, by living more agreeably to his Profession. But though this may be too great an occasion of offence, for which they that give it must at last be severely answerable; yet, I hope, it is no just objection against the truth of that doctrine which so entirely forbids it. For if it were, it would be an objection against all good doctrine whatever, and even against Reason it self, which all allow is as much contradicted by the vicious lives of those, who profess they ought to be governed by it. The Gospel was not intended to force men to be good;

good, but to give them the best motives and encouragements to be so, and then to leave them to their choice, whether they would comply with the terms of it. And as I have, in a former discourse, observed, that the Gospel had undeniably this good effect upon the lives of the first Christians, which continued as long as it was profess'd only by those who did really believe it; so, I doubt not, but the like effect would appear again, if those who believe it, upon a sincere conviction of its Truth and Excellency, could be separated from those who only put on an outside profession of it, because it is the custom of the country. And even, as the case now stands, where there is so great a mixture of many Nominal, with a few Real Christians, I hope; if a Christian Country were compared with any others, that have never heard of the Name of Christ, an impartial man would find a very considerable difference in the lives and manners of men to the advantage of the Christian Cause; even though it be allowed, that the corruption of Christianity may have made some men much worse than they would otherwise have been.

I do not pretend to have mentioned all the particular prejudices of men against the Christian Revelation (some of which are ground-
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ed upon difficult or mis-understood places of Holy Scripture, or not being sufficiently acquainted with ancient Customs and Languages, and so wresting what they do not understand, to the perversion of what they do.) But from the nature of these which I have touched upon, as most common, we may be able to form some judgment of the rest; and to see that they proceed not from any real defect in the Gospel, which can make a wise and unprejudiced man think it the less worthy of God: and therefore since it has all the evidence, which I have mentioned before, that any Revelation can have, of its being from God, we can have no just reason to refuse our assent to it; but rather heartily to thank God for having *called us to this estate of salvation through Christ, and to hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering; and to study the holy Scriptures constantly, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to shew us more and more the Excellency of the Knowledge of the Gospel of Christ, by which we shall be saved, unless we have believed in vain.*

I shall conclude all with that exhortation of the Apostle, with which I begun my first Discourse,

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course, *Take heed, Brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the Living God.*

Now unto him who is able to keep us from falling; and to present us faultless before the presence of his Glory with exceeding joy; To the Only Wise God, our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, now and for ever. Amen.

F I N I S.









